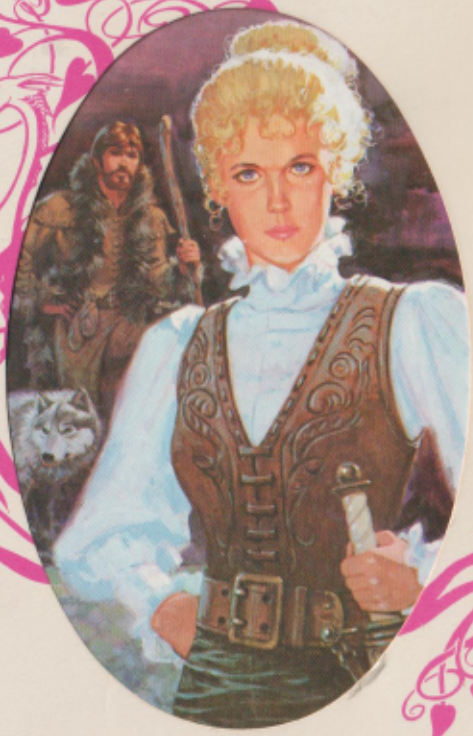
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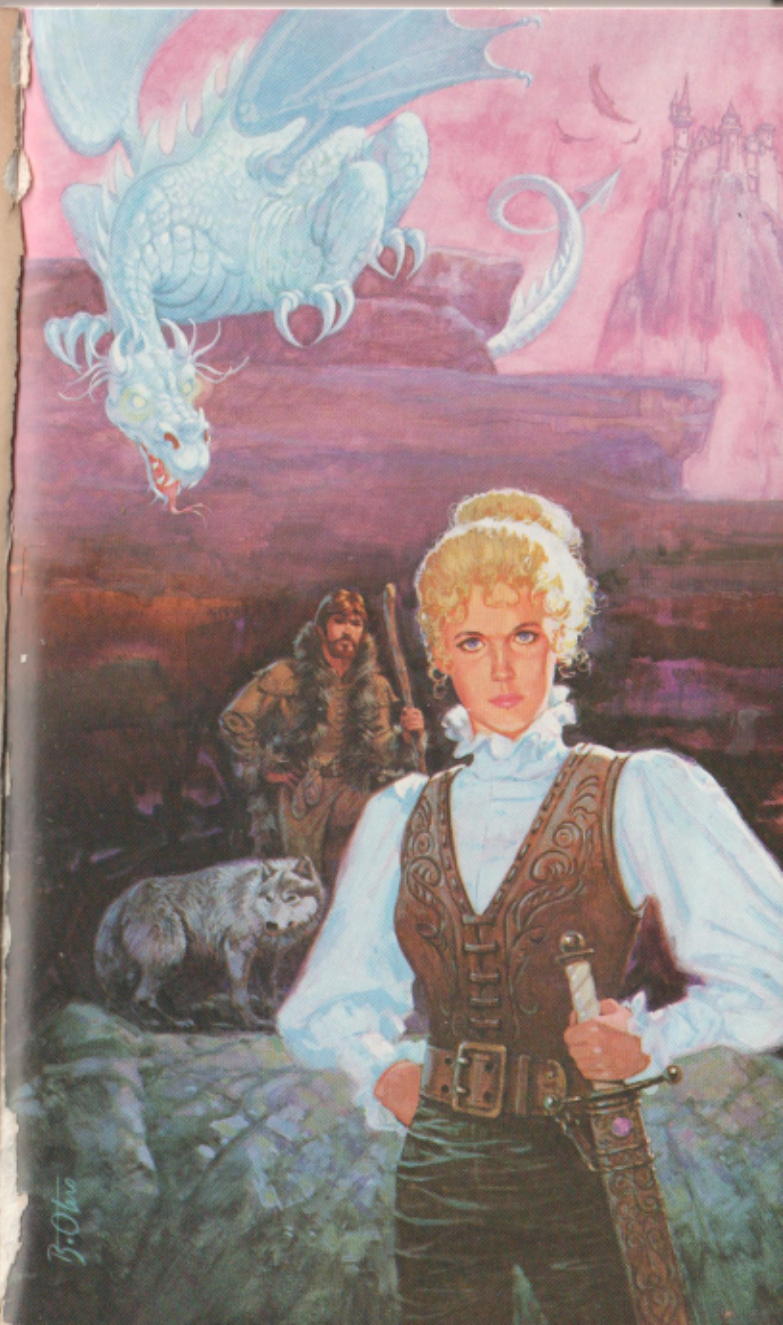
Moon Dragon Summer

BY LINDA LOWERY

$2.25 8805



PICK A PATH TO ROMANCE AND ADVENTURE™



PICK A PATH TO ROMANCE AND ADVENTURE

Blushing from Folc's direct gaze, you stand up abruptly, feeling warm in spite of the cool sea breeze coming in through the window of his cottage.

You take a deep breath and say, "I really must be on my way now. Thank you for supper, Folc."

"On your way?" says the mountain man. "But I . . ."

I must attend to my quest, you tell yourself. *I can't let my feelings for this man, no matter how charming and sensitive I find him, avert me from my goal.*

A champion swordswoman, determined to rid Stonekin Hollow of the mind-controlling, murderous Moon Dragon, you now wonder whether you should seek elsewhere for the magical assistance you need.

But when your eyes finally meet Folc's, you can see that his disappointment is real, and your heart whispers to you, *Stay. Stay here with this magician. He can help you to complete your quest.*

"Won't you please stay, Summer?" Folc asks, his eyes drawing you into their crystalline depths.

Will you leave and look for a magician who won't represent a romantic entanglement for you?

Or do you want to stay and be honest with Folc about your feelings?

Whichever path you pick, you are sure to find romance and adventure as MOON DRAGON SUMMER

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HEART QUEST™ BOOK #5

Moon Dragon Summer

BY LINDA LOWERY



Cover art by Larry Day
Interior art by Valerie Valusek

TSR, Inc.
PRODUCTS OF YOUR IMAGINATION™

For Winifred Hogan and Mimi Overall,
two sunbeams

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You are about to set off on a romantic adventure in which *you* will face many decisions. Some choices you will determine with your head—others with your heart. Each choice takes you on a different path to a separate ending. So be careful . . . you must choose wisely.

Do not read this book from beginning to end. Instead, as you are faced with a decision, follow the instructions and keep turning to the pages where your choices lead you until you come to an end. You may meet a handsome adventurer or chance upon self-discovery. Success or disaster—the choice that leads you there is yours!



ut, Edmond," you say, twisting a blonde curl around your finger. "I just don't think I'm ready for marriage yet."

Edmond flashes a white smile.

"How long have we known each other, Summer?" he asks, his blue eyes twinkling.

"Well, I suppose you could say I've known you ever since I was a baby. . . ."

"Sixteen years," confirms your mother, from her tapestry armchair nearby.

"Sixteen years!" Edmond agrees. "And you're still not ready to marry me, Summer? That doesn't say much for my powers of persuasion, now, does it?" He tugs on the lace cuff of his doublet in mock distress.

"Edmond, this isn't a lighthearted matter!" you moan. "This is a very important decision we're talking about."

Then your eyes widen as an uncharacteristic concern darkens his fine features. He drops to one knee and leans toward you, his hair smelling of scented soap.

"You're right, Summer. And I'm very serious," he says quietly. "If you marry me, I promise you everything you've always wanted. A mansion by the sea, with lots of windows. Silks and jewels, more than you can count. All the comforts of a good life. . . ."

"But, Edmond, I don't know if that's what I want," you say. Your eyes trace the stained glass border of the window. "I have other goals to consider. I need some time. . . ."

"Time?" cries your mother. "This fine young man is asking for your hand in marriage, and you say you need time? Summer, why do you torment him—and me—with your indecision?"



"And your mother," Edmond continues. "She'll have whatever she wants, too. I'll—"

At that moment, something outside sends your heart leaping to your throat, and you jump from your chair and bound to the window.

"Look!" you scream. "Look at our acacia tree!"

Edmond and your mother hurry to your side.

"Why, it's dead!" howls Lady Mertice. "How can that be? It just began to bloom yesterday! My favorite tree . . ."

Right before your eyes, the last of its delicate white flowers drop to the ground. The tree stands stark and leafless against the evening sky, its black silhouette veiled in a cloud of shimmering pink dust.

"I knew this would happen one day!" you cry, pounding your fist on the sill. "It's the work of the Moon Dragon! It's not enough that Lumanor has left Tarsia devastated. Now that beast wants to destroy Stonekin Hollow, too!"

"Now, wait a minute, Summer," says Edmond, grasping your arm firmly. "Settle down. How do you know it's the dragon? How do you know it's not just some kind of blight? I mean, trees die every day."

You tear your arm from Edmond's grip, exasperated. "They don't die within minutes, Edmond! And they aren't normally hung with the dragon's pink mist!"

Your eyes scan beyond the tree, along the walled passage leading up Tarsia Mountain. At the top stands the crumbling sandstone castle Lumanor has occupied since he killed the king of Tarsia a decade ago.

"Look!" you cry, your heart racing. "It WAS the dragon that destroyed the tree! He's just now returning to his lair!"

You watch as the dragon soars toward Perched Castle, on great shimmering wings, his blue scales luminous in the light of the rising moon. He soon dives into the veil of pink fog surrounding the castle and disappears.

"The dead tree is a warning from Lumanor," you say. "Soon he will attack Stonekin Hollow, killing flowers and trees and birds with his evil dust. And, worst of all, the dragon will hypnotize our people. The Hollow will be just like Tarsia. Don't you see?"

"Let's not get carried away, Summer," says Edmond. "Maybe you're right. Maybe the dragon's breath did destroy your mother's tree. But what's all this about hypnotizing people?"

"Grandma Millicent told me all about it," you say breathlessly, the words spilling from your mouth. "The dragon has hypnotic eyes and enchants people, so they become totally committed to his evil ways. And those of strong constitution, who refuse to look into his eyes and be enchanted, are killed as quickly as our acacia tree. The dragon calls them dissidents.

"And grandma told me," you add with a shiver, "that more than once, she'd come across bodies of dissidents Lumanor left lying in the Tarsian woods."

"Yes, and then she disappeared herself," says Lady Mertice, fidgeting with the jewels at her bosom. "And though the townsmen searched for days, they found no trace of her." Then she adds, wailing, "And there's nothing we can do about it!"

"But there is, mother!" you cry. "My sword is the only sword powerful enough to slay the dragon. I have a duty to stop this destruction. And I'm leaving for Perched Castle tonight!"

"Your grandmother never should have given you that sword. That's what put these wild ideas in your head in the first place. You can't go, Summer! You may never come back alive. I may never see you . . ."

"She's right," agrees Edmond. "Your mother and I care about you. You can't just up and decide to go off and maybe get yourself killed."

"But if the dragon is responsible for grandmother's disappearance, I *must* try to stop him," you cry.

You bolt off to your room, hearing Lady Mertice's voice carry down the hallway. "She's so stubborn! Just like her grandmother was! Edmond, we must think of a way to change her mind."

Flying into your room, you bolt the door behind you. *I* am *like Grandma Millicent,* you think, securing a handful of your blonde curls back with a ribbon. *The same amethyst eyes, the same chin. I even have her strong build, her broad shoulders. She and I weren't made to sit around embroidering tapestries,* you think. *We were meant to fight battles, to lead causes.*

Tossing your dress on the bed, you lace up your leather vest and stuff your trousers into fur-lined boots. Then your eyes scan the shelf that holds lances and swords, your favorite treasures since childhood.

"Why can't you play with your dolls like the other girls?" your mother moaned time and time again. "I just don't know what to do with you, Summer! I cringe to think you won the Golden Cup for swordsmanship three years in a row! It's so unbecoming to a young lady."

But your grandmother understood. "You must do what your heart tells you," she said. "If you want to be a fighter, you must be the best fighter you can be."

"Grandmother," you remember saying, "I want even more than that. Someday, I want to do what no man has ever been able to do. I want to slay the Moon Dragon."

Your grandmother did not laugh. She did not say, "But you're only a girl." Instead she took your hands and looked at you very gravely.

"Then you will do it, Summer," she whispered. "If you want it badly enough and work at it with all your heart and soul, you will do it."

It was then that she gave you the magic sword. "I received this from a dissident of the Moon Dragon, when I was in Tarsia," she said. "It is the only weapon that has the power to kill the dragon."

Now you reach up and pull the pearl-handled sword from the shelf. "Yes, Streak, you're coming with me," you say, running your finger gently across the blade. The sword glows with a light as bright as the sun.

You slip Streak into its golden sheath and strap a dagger inside your boot. Then you cross to a small cupboard and, opening it, take out a tiny jar filled with sunbeams, another gift from your grandmother.

"Lumanor derives his deadly powers from Tarsia's two moons," she had told you. "The sunbeams burn the poisonous vapors off the pink fog, weakening his powers. But use them sparingly. There are only enough in this jar to be powerful against the dragon once."

After checking your supplies, you strap the knapsack on your back and return to the drawing room. Your mother is stretched out on a low couch, weak from worry, her bosom heaving up and down. Next to her is Edmond, wiping her forehead with his handkerchief.

"It's time for me to go now," you say quietly.

Your mother lets out a sob. "Please, Summer, please don't go. Stay and marry Edmond."

"Mother," you say, "I'm the finest swordswoman the Hollow has ever seen. Before I can think of accepting Edmond's proposal, I must do what I can to stop Lumanor's path of destruction."

Suddenly your mother sits bolt upright, shooting a glance at Edmond. "If you must go, Summer—and I repeat, I want you to stay—but if you must go, take Edmond along, won't you, dear? Knowing that he's with you would certainly ease my mind."

Edmond's face goes blank at first, and then a smile plays on his lips.

"Well, I didn't really think of that," you mumble. *He's no fighter,* you think. *He's a merchant. And he's not very serious. Would he be of any use on this quest . . . or even understand how important it is?*

You look back to your mother, and the tears welling in her eyes sting your heart. *It would be easy to do what she wants,* you think. *After all, I do like Edmond, and we probably could make a good life together.*

And yet, if I don't stop the dragon, who will?

Your face begins to burn with the pressure of the decision, but you know you must make up your mind.

If you abide by your mother's wishes and stay to marry Edmond, turn to page 54.

If you go, taking Edmond with you to ease your mother's mind, turn to page 139.

If you decide to go alone, turn to page 49.

Sir Euston extends his hand. "Please, milady, it would give me joy to know that I have made this world a better place by protecting your beauty from harm."

If this knight, experienced in battle, wants to destroy the dragon, perhaps I should wait and see if he can, you think. *My goal is the dragon's death. Whichever of us accomplishes this feat is of no consequence. Besides, if he fails, I can set out again in a few days' time.*

You replace Streak at your side and place your hand in his. He lifts you onto the ornate saddle of his steed and gallops down the path toward the Hollow.

When your mother sees you dismounting from the handsome knight's horse, her mouth drops open in shock. "A knight in shining armor, Summer!" she cries, hugging you. "How wonderful that he's rescued you and brought you back to me!"

Wincing at your mother's belief that you needed rescuing, you bid the knight good-bye.

"Farewell!" calls Euston, turning his steed with an elegant flick of the reins. "I shall return tomorrow, milady, triumphantly!"

He rides off, his silhouette graceful against the backdrop of the mountain. "I hope so, Sir Euston," you murmur. "But I'm afraid I'll never see you again."

And you are right. The next day there is no word from the gallant knight. But as the moon begins to rise, the dragon strikes again, this time destroying half the Hollow, leaving deadly trails of pink dust in his path. And you know that even if you pack up your sword and sunbeams again, it is too late. For many of those you loved in Stonekin Hollow have already reached

THE END

"Let's stall for time with an appeal," you whisper to Edmond. "Then we can plan our escape."

You turn to Judge Dourblood. "We wish to appeal our case," you say.

As the words spill from your mouth, the orc guards leap to grab hold of you again.

Dourblood bellows, his pink eyes popping out at you, "Then I sentence you criminals to be drawn and quartered by the orcs in this courtroom! The execution will take place at moonrise!"

Your heart jumps to your throat as the wild mob charges down the aisle toward you, their clubs and sticks flying. You bite into the arm of an orc guard to try to free yourself. He howls in pain, dropping your arm. You pull out Streak and slash the orc across the head, sending him tumbling to the ground.

"Order!" bellows Judge Dourblood. "I said moonrise, I didn't say now!" He slams his gavel so hard it splinters to bits. The mob is nearly on top of you now, and you and Edmond leap back toward the bench.

But all of a sudden, to your amazement, the attacking orcs begin to slow down, their feet heavy. Their shouts turn to yawns, and their weapons drop from their hands. One by one, they collapse into a giant, snoring heap on the courtroom floor.

"They're out cold!" you cry, turning to the judge.

"I demand ord . . ." Dourblood begins, but cannot finish, for just then his lids droop sleepily and his bristly head slumps down onto the bench.

"Quick!" calls a friendly voice from the doorway. "You've got to get out of here right away!"

Please turn to page 76.

You spend the next day planning your strategy. Folc prepares pouches filled with magic ingredients, and you sharpen Streak to a fine edge. By that evening, you are prepared to set off for the wolves' lair, and you follow Jarlath up the moonlit path.

As one moon sets and the other rises, you enter a woods of pines, bare of needles, and leafless birches, where flowers nod their withered heads and dead stumps rise from the ground.

All at once and from out of nowhere, a band of elves appears in the middle of a clearing, a fire blazing in their midst. They are playing flutes and laughing, shooting quick, sidelong glances in your direction. You both stop, your eyes wide in amazement.

"Don't move too fast," whispers Folc, "or they might run away, frightened"

The elves dance around the fire, their yellow hair entwined with bluebells and lily of the valley. Their red tunics sail about them, and their faces glow in the firelight. They look out of place, so happy, as if oblivious to the bleak desolation that surrounds them.

A small figure, clad in chainmail and wearing a hooded cloak that shadows his eyes, steps toward you from the group.

"It's a beautiful evening for dancing," he says in the elven language you studied when you were young.

"Why, you're Dorbin, aren't you?" Folc asks, speaking perfect elvish. "The elf-king. We met once, at the Magicians' School in Dromigall. You taught me your Color Spray Spell, remember?"

"I remember the meeting well," says the elf-king, from deep within his hood. "And you are Folc of Tarsia. We good magic-users must stick together—there

aren't many of us left. Please, I would be honored to have you join my clan for a dance."

"Well," says Folc, turning to you. "I suppose we could stop for just one dance. What do you think, Summer?"

"I don't know, Folc," you say. "I'm not much of a dancer. I never spent any time learning. I was always practicing with my swords and . . ." You feel a nervous fluttering in your stomach, knowing you would trip over Folc's feet if you tried to dance.

"It's really an honor to be invited, Summer. These are good-hearted elves who usually keep to themselves. Don't be nervous," he says then, his eyes bright. "You'd be wonderful in the firelight, beneath the stars."

Suddenly the clearing is quiet. The elves wait for your answer, their faces glowing pink in the firelight.

I'd like to try, you think. *It's hard to pass up a chance to dance on such a beautiful evening and with Folc close to me. But then again, we really don't have time to stop. We should be moving on to the cave wolves.*

You look at Folc, and his eyes glow soft and brown in the moonlight.

What are you going to do?

Should you continue on your way to the cave wolves?
Turn to page 42.

Or should you stop for a while to dance with Folc?
Turn to page 147.

"You go ahead, Edmond, if you wish," you say. "But I don't trust these dragonflies. I'd rather continue on to the Academy of Magic."

"Suit yourself," says Edmond, shrugging his shoulders. "We'll do it your way. He slowly slips off the back of the giant insect.

"I'm sorry," he tells the dragonflies. "I appreciate your kind offer, but it seems my friend and I disagree, and we will continue on by foot."

"As you wish," hums the leader. For a moment you think you see a flash of anger flit across the bright eyes of the insect, but then the look is gone. The swarm ascends into the moonlit sky but still hovers above the bare treetops.

"You're a very stubborn girl, Summer," says Edmond, brushing specks of pink dust off his clothes. "And you're taking all the fun out of this journey."

"Fun?" you cry in disbelief. "This journey isn't supposed to be fun!"

"If you want me to continue along with you," he goes on, ignoring your outburst, "you're going to have to have to make some concessions."

"Concessions!" you moan. "What are you talking about?"

"You're the fighter, right?" Edmond asks.

"Yes. So . . .?"

"I can't just follow you around like some lackey."

Your mouth opens in protest, but Edmond holds a finger to your lips to silence you. "I've been a merchant for a long time, Summer, and I've been trained to have a logical mind. I can size up a situation fast as quicksilver."

"Logical mind!" you cry, refusing to be silenced by

his finger. "You may call it logical, Edmond. I call it naive!"

"Call it what you will," he says. "At any rate, I insist on making the decisions from now on. I really don't like having a woman tell me what to do. And if you're going to be my future wife—"

"You came along to help me, Edmond, not to direct me," you huff. "And future wife or not, I won't go against my better judgment. I think those dragonflies were untrustworthy. Just because you disagreed—"

"Make up your mind, Summer. Either you let me make the decisions, or you can just continue this little dragonquest on your own."

His arrogant tone infuriates you. "Then here we part, Edmond!" you declare, raising your chin high. "And I'll see you back in the Hollow, when I return triumphantly, the dragon's claw in hand!"

"Very well!" snaps Edmond.

He spins on his heel and heads back down toward the base of the mountain.

I'll do just fine on my own! you tell yourself. *I'm perfectly capable of making decisions myself!* But a nagging feeling of discomfort is mixed with your anger. *Edmond and I never fought like this before. Could it be that I* am *too stubborn? That I take everything too seriously?*

As you storm up the walled path, trying to sort out your thoughts, you realize you still hear the hum of the dragonflies nearby. As you listen, their droning grows louder and more fierce.

Suddenly they swarm down and surround you on all sides. Their shimmering eyes pierce the darkness, sending a chill straight to your heart.

"I see your friend has gone," says the leader, its voice no longer soft and humming but gruff. You move your hand to Streak's hilt.

"What do you want?" you demand.

"If you will not come willingly," it snarls, "then we will have to force you!"

With that, it twists its antennae around your shoulders, winding them tight as snakes. You grasp hold of the antennae and try to force them back over your head. Wriggling free from their grip, you draw Streak and point it at the dragonfly.

"Move back!" you cry. Your heart is racing, and you realize the pink dust now hangs above you thick as a cloud.

I have no idea what powers these creatures possess, you think fearfully. *Perhaps I could try to run for the forest. The branches are thick and gnarled, and I don't think they could follow me through the trees.*

Or I can try to fight them off with my sword. If I strike the leader, maybe the others will be frightened and take off.

Should you to stay and fight them off?
Turn to page 102.

Or will you decide to run for the woods?
Turn to page 91.

Your eyes dart from the Folc at your side to the Folc moving toward you. *I can't kill the real Folc by mistake,* you think, your mind racing in panic. *I must wait. I must wait for a signal of some kind.*

Just then, with lightning speed, the Folc moving in on you pounces on the other Folc, hurling him to the ground. He attacks violently, like an animal, howling and shrieking, and you know at once it is the monster.

You leap toward the doppleganger, and just as you go to plunge your sword into its back, it jumps to its feet, springing away from your blade.

Your eyes widen in terror as you see the monster is no longer Folc, but a girl, with blonde hair. She is identical to you, your exact double, amethyst eyes and all. You stand frozen in shock, unable to attack your identical image.

In a split second, the other Summer lunges toward you and throws you to the ground, Streak flying out of your hand. You roll over, reaching for Streak, but your head shoots with pain, and your arm collapses onto Folc's lifeless body.

Just then the monster snatches your sword into her hand and leaps toward you. As the blade plunges downward, you close your eyes, knowing that you and Folc have both reached

THE END

There is another place I can go for help, you think. *Grandma Millicent said something about traveling to see a creature who lived high on the mountain, not far from Perched Castle itself. I'm not sure what sort of being would live up there, but I know it was her friend.*

You trudge up the walled path, ascending higher and higher. As you near the mountaintop, wisps of pink fog appear and circle your head, filling your nostrils with a dry, metallic odor. *The residue of a recent attack by the dragon,* you think. *Luckily the poison is too weak now to affect me.*

An eeriness creeps into your bones. Placing one hand on the stone wall, you feel your way up the path in the darkness of the night. *How will I ever find this creature?* you think. *I don't even know who I'm looking for. Maybe I should turn back and go find Folc. . . .*

Suddenly a light, bright as midday, radiates through the darkness. It seems to be coming from a cavern in the mountainside. You cover your eyes, protecting them from the light, and move along the wall until you reach the cavern. You pull your sword and peek inside, keeping your body pinned against the rocks.

There, in the midst of the white light, sits a golden beast with the mane of a lion and the wings of a great bird. His eyes are shut in meditation, but they open slowly and focus on you.

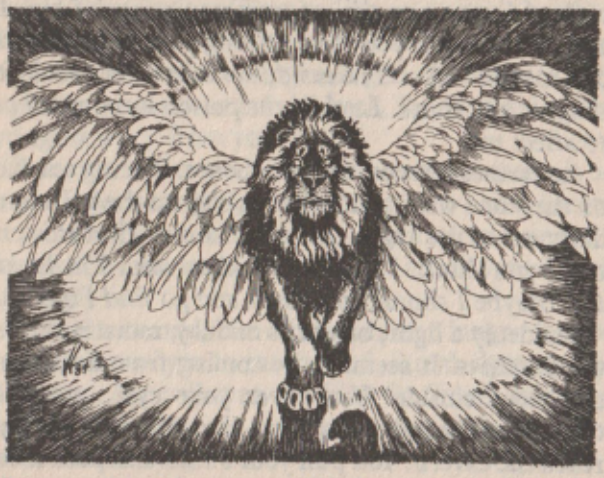
The beast smiles calmly. "So you have come at last," he says, his voice echoing through the cave.

Sweat moistens your palms, and you grip Streak's hilt tightly. *It certainly isn't the dragon,* you think, *but I've never seen such a strange creature before.*

"You know who I am?" you stammer, still not entering the cavern.

"You are Summer. You've been sent by your grandmother Millicent. You have come to Tarsia to conquer the evil Moon Dragon."

His golden eyes, shining as powerfully as the sun, have no pupils. You shiver, feeling that somehow this beast knows too much about you.



"Do not fear," he purrs. "You have come to the right place. I am Sirk-Nayr, the lammasu. It is I who gave your grandmother the sunbeams and the sword."

"No!" you say, your eyes widening.

"The magic weapons will help you in your battle against the dragon. They will help you free your grandmother."

"Free my grandmother!" you exclaim. "She's alive? Where? How . . . ?"

The beast drops lashless lids down over his golden eyes. "Please be seated, Summer," he says. "I will tell you everything."

You creep forward, searching the cavern for any danger. But it seems the lammasu is alone, and, wanting to hear about your grandmother, you sit cross-legged before the beast on rocks warmed by the brilliant white light.

"What is the source of all this light?" you ask.

"I have spent years collecting sunlight, capturing it to fill my cavern," purrs Sirk-Nayr. "The dragon won't come near me. All this light would destroy his powers, derived from the moon as they are."

You think of Grandma Millicent, sitting in this very place, receiving the sunbeams from the lammasu. "Now tell me about my grandmother," you say then.

"Yes," agrees the golden creature. "Lumanor has a thousand eyes and a thousand ears, Summer. He knew that your grandmother came to Tarsia to convince the citizens to band together against his evil power."

Sirk-Nayr rolls his shining eyes upward. "The dragon succeeded in hypnotizing most of the people and demanded your grandmother as a sacrifice. And one autumn day, when she was in her garden in the Hollow, a band of entranced elves captured her. They bound her and carried her off to Lumanor, as proof of their loyalty to the monster."

"And what did the dragon do with her?" you cry, your heart in your throat.

"She lives, Summer," says Sirk-Nayr. "But she is imprisoned in the crater of the Moon Dragon."

You leap to your feet and pace back and forth. "Then I must free her right away. Is she hypnotized?"

"Perhaps. She has a strong will, but the hypnotic power of Lumanor's eyes is terrible. Few creatures are immune to his direct gaze."

You look at this calm, all-knowing beast, who seems so content to sit in meditation.

"If you're so powerful," you cry suddenly, "then why don't you save her?"

"There is only one way to save your grandmother, Summer. That is to destroy the dragon. And I do not have that power. I have only enough power to protect myself against the dragon's hypnosis and to help others do the same."

"Well, then it's up to me," you say, the urgency of your quest quickening your blood. "What do you suggest I do?"

"I cannot tell you what to do," purrs the golden beast. "But what I can do is give you protection from the hypnotic gaze of the dragon."

The beast rubs its great paws together and opens them again. There in its palm lies a beautiful jewel, an amethyst, on a golden chain.

"It is an amulet, Summer," says Sirk-Nayr. "You must wear it at all times to make certain you will not be hypnotized."

You reach for the necklace and slip it over your head.

"Is there anything else you can give me?" you ask.

"You have the sunbeams and the sword" says the lammasu. "And if you feel you need further assistance, you might bring a magician with you, the best magician."

"And who might that be?" you ask.

"There is a man named Folc. He lives here, by the Tarsian Sea. He is, by far, the best."

"We have met," you say. You think for a moment. "But do you think I have the strength and the

power to do this on my own, without a magician's help?" you ask then.

"That is your decision, not mine," says the lammasu. It bows its golden head then and mumbles strange utterings from deep in his throat.

"There. The amulet has now received its power," says Sirk-Nayr. "Go on your way. And may goodness go with you."

"Thank you," you say. You hate to leave. It is warm and comforting here, the sunlight pleasant. But go you must, and turning on your heel, you plunge into the hollow darkness of the mountain pass.

You raise your head to the moon, contemplating your next move. *Perhaps I can conquer the dragon single-handedly,* you think. *I have my sunbeams, my sword, and this amulet, and it would be satisfying to know that it could be my victory alone, with no help.*

Yet the dragon is very powerful, and if even one of my weapons fails, I'm doomed. "Don't let your stubbornness get in the way of clear thinking," your mother had said.

You glance uphill, where only a short distance away sits Perched Castle. You glance downhill, where the winding trail will take you back to Folc's house.

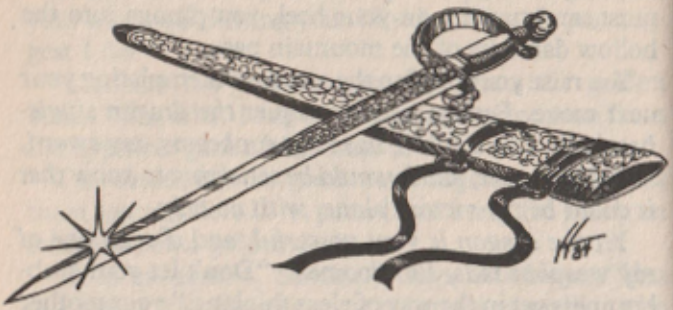
Which way will you go?

If you decide to head downhill toward Folc, turn to page 72.

If you decide to head straight for the Moon Dragon, turn to page 98.

Since he is determined to slay the dragon, you think, *it can't hurt to ask him along on my quest. Two fighters would be stronger than one.*

"Since I have the magic sword and you have weapons of your own," you ask, "why don't we go together to battle the dragon?"



Sir Euston shakes his head vigorously.

"I cannot do that, milady," he says. "It is a direct contradiction of the code of chivalry that is deeply engraved in my heart. You see, it is my mission to save damsels in distress. To allow you, a beautiful lady, to accompany me, is to put your life in jeopardy. Please reconsider my offer to take you home."

Please turn to page 48 and choose again.

The humiliation would be terrible, you think. *But losing my grandmother and my homeland forever would be worse still. I just hope I can trust the monster to hold to his word.*

"Down!" bellows Lumanor, his voice snarling powerfully. "Hand me your sunbeams and get down on your knees before me!"

"Don't, Summer!" Folc pleads. But you ignore him. You can't even look at his face.

Slowly you pull out your flowered jar, and the dragon snatches it into his claw. Then you kneel down, and just as you do, Lumanor lunges toward you and, with a glimmering swipe, tears the amulet from its chain, ripping your vest at the same time.

You whip your head up, stunned and furious. Instantly, the dragon's eyes meet yours. They glow like moonbeams, shimmering and glistening with white and pink, drawing you in slowly, the coolness creeping through your veins.

Look away, you tell yourself. But it is useless. You feel yourself floating, floating far down into a cool pink mist, your eyes tingling from the cold.

"Come here, Summer. Come to me," you hear your grandmother's voice say. Or is it her? Gradually the sweet voice so familiar to you turns into the commanding voice of the Moon Dragon.

"Grandma!" you cry. "Where are you?" But soon all thoughts of Grandma Millicent fade into the mist, and you find yourself caring only about your sword.

I feel powerful, you think, *and I need Streak in my hand.* You smile up at Lumanor, the secret smile of conspirators. Lumanor smiles back, his beautiful eyes shining.

He lifts his claws, and you reach up to take Streak from them, hurling the white rabbit from your arms to the corner. The animal whimpers, and you laugh cruelly.

Then you turn to the bearded magician across the chamber. You brandish your shining blade, and prowl slowly, methodically toward him.

"If you refuse to be enchanted," you snarl, "then you must die!"

"Summer," he cries, his dark eyes pleading. "I'm Folc. Don't you remember?"

"Of course, I remember!" you hiss. "You are the dissident who lives in the woods overlooking the sea. Now get down on your knees and pay homage to your dragon!"

As you move in on Folc, his eyes flash with fire, and the laughter of the Moon Dragon rings cold and hollow through the chamber.

THE END

You look into the elf-king's light green eyes and know that you can trust him, now that the spell is broken.

"What's the plan?" you ask, moving your hand to the hilt of your sword.

"We will return to our dancing," Dorbin says. "You must dance as if you are under a spell, and I will raise my hood so the dragon cannot see my eyes. Then—"

He stops abruptly as a great gust of wind sweeps across the treetops. You look up to see a black figure flash across the glowing moon. Its great wings flap, its tail whips, and suddenly it takes a dive downward toward the clearing. Your heart jumps to your throat as the dragon approaches.

"I've no time to explain further. Quick, to your places!" cries Dorbin, pulling up his hood. "And just remember that Lumanor's vulnerable spot is at the base of his throat—the mark of a crescent moon."

The elf is silenced as the Moon Dragon descends, slowly circling the clearing. Folc takes you in his arms as the music resumes, and you spin round and round the fire. This time there is no dizziness, just the pounding of blood in your temples.

An eerie aura veils the clearing as the dragon closes in. The sweet music of the flutes is swallowed up, the trees no longer rustle in the breeze. It's as if you are in a vacuum, cushioning all sound and scent and vision. *Silent as a tomb,* you think.

The dragon lands in the clearing and with a puff, extinguishes the fire, leaving nothing but smoldering ash. You feel the shadow of his wings over your head like a roof, a coolness filtering down from his luminescent scales, and you are frozen with terror.

Panicky, you raise your eyes to Folc's. As you do, the

Moon Dragon catches your glance. His pale eyes glow in the darkness, threads of shimmering pink trailing across the whites. Now the beast throws back his head in rage. He lets out a mighty bellow, baring his razor-sharp teeth, shining in the moonlight.

"So these are the dissidents who dare to thwart my enchantment!" he howls. "Prepare to die, fools!"

Just then, Dorbin shouts something in elvish, and a tremendous flash of light flies from his fingers and blazes in the clearing, blinding you for a moment. You bury your head in Folc's chest and hear the king cry, "Folc! Weave another Light Spell! We need all the light we can get to blind the dragon!"

With that, Folc steps back and closes his eyes in concentration. Your eyes dart from Folc to the raging dragon, who is howling wildly, his great wings flapping, sending elves tumbling to the forest floor. You back away from the wings and stay clear of the beating tail, as Folc sends a blinding burst of light into the clearing.

The dragon bellows again, blinded by the light and flailing his lustrous head so now you can see the mark of the moon crescent at his throat.

"You shall all die!" the great beast screeches.

Your fingers shaking, you fumble in your knapsack for the magical sunbeams. Just as you pull the tiny jar from the bag, the dragon's wing swipes across the side of your head, and you crash to the ground, your sword flying out of your hand.

But the sunbeam jar is still in your grip. You feel for the cover as Lumanor breathes his poisonous pink vapors, obscuring your vision. And then, through the fog, his two huge eyes threaded with shimmering pink

appear before you and you hurl your jar at the beast. It hits him between the eyes, the sunbeams sputtering and dissolving the pink fog around you and the beast.

Streak lies close on the ground and as the dragon shrieks in rage, you lunge for your blade.

Still half-blinded by the sunbeams, the dragon flails his head, catching sight of the gleaming sword.

"Little girls should not play with such sharp toys," he hisses.

Then he dives straight at you, but you hold your ground, a plan forming in your mind. Just as Lumanor is about to clamp his vicious teeth down upon you, you slash Streak in a bright arc beneath the dragon's jaws.

Wounded, the monster rears his head back, and there, on the throat, you can see the mark of the crescent moon! The dragon roars in pain and anger. His huge head, dripping blood, plummets down to crush you and end this battle. Sickened by the beast's blood raining down on you, you grit your teeth and lunge forward, raising Streak high. Your eyes block out everything but the crescent moon.

Your heart pounding, you clasp the sword firmly in both hands, the blade pointing upward. Then you stab with all your strength, forcing Streak's sharp blade deep into the dragon's throat.

A deafening roar echoes through the clearing, and then . . . nothing—total silence, as the dragon sinks to the ground. The pink mist surrounding the clearing slowly dissipates into the evening air.

"He's dead!" shouts Dorbin. "And we are free."

Shaking, you close your eyes and feel Folc's arm wrap around your shoulder. You turn to him, letting yourself melt into his strong arms.

"You did it, Summer," he whispers. "You conquered the evil Moon Dragon."

"No, Folc, not I. *We* conquered the Moon Dragon. We did it together."

Your words are drowned out by the music and the cheering of the elves. They gather around the two of you, making a circle, dancing and singing and tossing the flowers from their hair.

Dorbin steps forward, and sending a golden flash from his fingertips, he restarts the bonfire. Then he places a hand on each of your shoulders.

"Now, you must honor us by joining us for another dance. A celebration dance. A dance that will last until the sun begins to rise in the morning sky!"

"Do you have to get back to the Hollow, Summer?" asks Folc. "I know Edmond is probably waiting."

You clasp your hands around his neck and look into his dark eyes. "No, Folc. There's nowhere I want to be more than here, with you, right now."

He smiles, his eyes bright as fire.

"And when sunrise comes," you add, "we'll just have to go back to Stonekin Hollow together, to tell everyone the great news."

"I suppose you're right, Summer," he agrees. "We'll have to do just that!"

Wrapping you in his arms, the mountain man spins you round and round, past the fire and the elves, beneath the stars, through the sparkling summer night.

THE END



I'd better not risk an encounter with another stranger, you think. *Since Folc is a magician, I'd rather head through the woods and see if I can find him.* You spin around and fly through the forest, leaping over the dead tree trunks that lie across the path and careful not to entangle your feet on the scraggly brush.

"Wait, milady!" calls the knight, galloping after you. "You seem to be in distress! I want to help you!"

But soon the horse's hoofbeats and the knight's voice fade into the distance. *I knew he couldn't make it through these tangled woods,* you think.

You leave the forest as the path continues along the coast of the Tarsian Sea, winding past the cottages of the abandoned village of Tarsia. *What an eerie place to live,* you think with a shiver.

Suddenly you stop, for you see a door studded with a wolf-head knocker. *This looks like it could be Folc's,* you think.

You knock, but no one answers. "Folc!" you call. "Folc?"

When there is no response, you give a little push, and the door opens into a dim room. The walls hold the coolness of the mountain night, and you shiver a bit, glancing around for a sign of Folc.

A parchment sheet on a table near the hearth catches your eye. *It looks like a letter,* you think. *Perhaps I shouldn't read it.* But your curiosity gets the best of you.

Please turn to page 103.

Even though bribery is wrong, you tell yourself, *it may be our only way of staying alive! And if it fails, we can always try to fight our way out.* You nod to Edmond, and you both approach the judge's bench.

Suddenly the orc guards leap forward, seizing your arms to pull you away from the judge.

"Just where do you think you're going, you filthy criminals?" snarls one.

"Wait a minute, Judge!" cries Edmond. "We have something of great importance to show you. Please have these orcs take their hands off us for just a moment."

"Let them go!" hollers Dourblood. "And this better be important," he adds, glaring at Edmond.

You approach the bench, and Edmond slips his hand into his doublet pocket, his body shielding it from the jury's view. He unties a small jewelry bag and shows the judge the ring he'd intended for your hand.

Dourblood's eyes light up like pink moons. "Come into my chambers for a moment," he mumbles.

You follow the judge out the door directly behind his bench. As soon as the door slams shut behind you, he dives for the diamond ring.

"What do you want for this?" he asks, his eyes glued to the ring.

"Freedom," you say. "We want you to let us go."

He glares at you for a long moment and then lets out a grunt. "If I decide to let you go," he snarls, "don't you ever try to set foot in Tarsia again. Or you'll be drawn and quartered. Do you understand?"

You and Edmond exchange relieved glances.

"We understand," you say. *I just want to get away from these orcs,* you think.

The judge rings a bell, and an enormous orc clad in heavy armor opens the back door. "Put these criminals onto the backs of a couple of dragonflies. And see that they get back to the lowlands."

You're so glad the bribe worked, you just do as you're told. Soon you are soaring into the night sky and down the mountainside, until you land in a field just outside of Stonekin Hollow. The dragonflies disappear, and you and Edmond trudge toward home.

"I'm glad we're alive," you say. "But I feel terrible. I feel as if we've failed. We can never go back to Tarsia."

Edmond stops short and turns to you. His jaw is set firmly, and his blue eyes are bright with anger.

"Who says we can't go back, Summer? We just have to be better prepared when we set out again."

"Edmond!" you cry. "I can't believe those words came out of your mouth!"

"Well, I'm angry now, at the unfair, abominable treatment we received in Tarsia! Someday, somehow, we're going back to slay that dragon, Summer!"

"That's wonderful, Edmond! You and I together . . ."

Your mind starts churning. *Maybe traveling with Edmond wouldn't be so bad after all, if he's going to show some commitment. Some backbone.*

His face is bright with a determined look. "We'll get suits of mithral armor," he says, "and find a magician right here in the Hollow to help us. Maybe two, three magicians . . ."

You smile to hear him talk. And you know that you will return to Tarsia to fight the Moon Dragon, even though, for the time being, you have reached

THE END

I just cannot trust my feelings, you think. *I must keep my mind on my quest alone, and I'm too attracted to this gentle mountain man.*

"I need some time alone to decide how I want to handle this quest," you tell him.

The disappointment in his eyes is real, and you know you will feel safer to be far away from him—far from the warm feelings he sends shooting to your heart.

"You still don't trust me, do you?" Folc asks.

"It's not that," you say quickly. "It's just that . . . I really need to do some thinking. I have to go."

"You must do what you think best," he says quietly. "But if you change your mind, Summer, I want to help you in your fight against the dragon."

"Thank you, Folc," you say, and you duck out quickly into the night air.

You feel relief and heaviness at the same time. *Things get so complicated,* you tell yourself, *when feelings get in the way of clear thinking.* Yet you can't shake off the glow you felt in Folc's fire-lit home. It clouds your head and fills your heart.

I'd better get some rest tonight, you think. *I must be clearheaded by morning, when I can go to the Academy of Magic for help.*

You find a small cavern that shadows the moonlight from your eyes and curl up, falling fast asleep.

"Summer!" calls a voice, interrupting your dreams. "Wake up, Summer!"

When you open your eyes, you are surprised to see a familiar face smiling down at you.

"Edmond," you say, rubbing the sleep from your eyes to make sure you're not dreaming.

"Look at you, just a babe in the mountain woods," he

quips. His white smile and lighthearted ways seem easy to deal with, after last night's turmoil.

"I decided to follow you, Summer," he says, quite proud of himself. "I couldn't believe you headed off all alone on this little dragonquest of yours."

"Don't be condescending, Edmond," you say, shaking out your blonde curls and tying them back with the ribbon. "This 'little dragonquest' happens to be a lifelong dream of mine."

"I know that, Summer," he says. "And that's why I've gone to the trouble of finding someone who can help you."

"Who?" you ask, surprised that Edmond is showing such concern.

"The old gnome, Widahl. He used to live in Tarsia. He says he can tell you all about the magical ways of the Moon Dragon."

"But Widahl is back in the Hollow," you say, brushing the wrinkles from your clothes as you stand up. "Now that I'm here, I'd hate to go back down."

"It won't take long," says Edmond. He wraps his arm around your waist. "And then, when we get the old gnome's advice, you and I can come back together to see what we can do about this dragon."

Your eyes widen in surprise. "I can't believe you're actually interested in this quest, Edmond."

"I'm not," he says, kissing the tip of your nose. "I'm interested in you. And I don't intend to let you go off alone and get killed by some crazy dragon."

I suppose it couldn't hurt to speak with Widahl, you say to yourself. *It would be a matter of only a day or two to reorganize. By then, maybe I will have forgotten all about Folc. . . .*"

"All right, Edmond," you agree. "I'll go back with you."

"Do you have an extra weapon, Summer?" he asks. "I didn't have time to get my father's sword."

"My dagger," you say. "You can use my dagger."

You reach into your boot for the knife and pull out instead a handful of tiny purple flowers, wilted and crushed, as if they've been there for hours.

"Violets!" you cry. And as you hold them in your hand, they suddenly come back to life, their stems stiffening, their delicate heads nodding in the breeze.

"How did that happen?" asks Edmond. "Those flowers were perfectly dead. . . ."

You turn your face away from Edmond so he cannot see the brightness in your eyes.

"Perhaps it's magic, Edmond," you say.

"Perhaps," he grumbles. "But that's a silly use of magical powers, no matter whose they may be. Toss them aside and get out your knife, will you, Summer?"

You reach back into your boot and hand your dagger to Edmond. When he's not watching, you stash the tiny bouquet into your vest pocket, next to your heart.

Edmond strides ahead down the walled and twisted path, the dagger in his hand. You follow behind, tracing the embroidery on his green doublet with your eyes. After all that traveling, his clothes are still impeccable, not a stain or a mud splash on them.

He's so comfortable, you think. *His stride is easy, his smile quick, he hasn't a care in the world. And . . .* You sigh. *That's the problem. He's not committed, not really committed, to anything at all. Edmond is so busy with the business of himself that he has no time to care about serious quests . . . or violets.*

"What's on your mind, Summer?" comes Edmond's voice. He has turned around and is rearranging his lace cuff, watching you. You realize now that you have slowed your pace and are lagging far behind him.

"Oh, nothing," you say, flushed. *I must stop these thoughts!* you scold yourself.

"Listen, Summer," says Edmond, moving toward you. "I wish you'd brighten up a bit. Here you are, your hand on the hilt of your sword, your face grave. Why not wipe that frown off your face and tell me what's on your mind? Don't you want to go back to the Hollow?"

"It's not that, Edmond," you say, unable to meet his eyes. You turn and lean over the wall, absently scanning the cliffs below. "It's not that exactly . . ."

"Well then, what is it? I can't stand this grim-faced solemnity! It's bad for the complexion. Now, out with it."

Your heart sinks, and you close your eyes for a moment, trying to get a grip on your feelings. Your mind fills with violets and the crystal brown of Folc's eyes and the warmth of his mountain home.

If I go back now with Edmond, you think, *he and Mother will surely pressure me about marriage and I'll be certain never to see Folc again.*

"Do I have to threaten you at knife-point to make you tell me what's going on in your head, Summer?"

If you decide to tell Edmond what you are thinking, turn to page 110.

If you push your thoughts of Folc aside and continue home with Edmond, turn to page 71.

Your eyes search the wild mob of orcs and see no sign of friendliness. *I'm sure we'll never get out of here alive unless we fight our way out,* you think.

You lean over and whisper to Edmond, "Come on, Edmond. Draw your sword, and let's get out of here!"

His mouth drops wide open, and for a moment you think he is frozen with fear. But as you whip out Streak, he reaches for his sword, and you dash back down the aisle. By the time the orcs realize what's happening, you've already reached the courtroom exit. The dragonfly guard, humming angrily, stretches its wings over the doorway to keep you from passing.

"Get out of my way!" you holler, but the insect doesn't budge, so you plunge your blade into its luminous body, and it sinks slowly to the floor.

"I'm behind you, Summer!" shouts Edmond. You can barely hear him over the shouts of the orcs.

"Stop them!" they bellow. "Hang them!"

As you charge toward the building entrance, you can hear the mob gaining on you, and suddenly Edmond's voice pierces the clamor.

"Help!" he shouts. "Summer! Help me!"

You spin around to see a mob of orcs jump Edmond, hurl him to the ground, and trample on top of him.

Just as you leap toward the pile of orcs, an amazing thing happens. One by one the beasts roll off of Edmond onto the floor. There they lie, fast asleep!

You scramble over their bristly bodies toward Edmond and pull him up onto his feet. Just then, you hear a voice from the front of the courthouse.

"Quick!" it shouts. "Come with me!"

Please turn to page 76.

It may be a beautiful night, you think, *but not for dancing with elves and mysterious magicians. I'd do best to keep my mind on my quest.*

"The moon is rising in the sky," you tell Folc. "I don't think we can spare even a few minutes. I'd rather move on to the wolves' lair."

"You're right," says Folc, though his dark eyes cloud over with disappointment. "We should be on our way."

He turns to Dorbin. "Thank you for inviting us, but we're in a hurry to move on. I'm sorry we disturbed you."

"Not at all," says the elf-king. "I'm certain we will meet again, Folc."

As you leave the elves and their fire, you watch Folc from the corner of your eye. *He's so easy to be with,* you think, *so understanding. Not at all like Edmond, who always wants to be in charge.*

You admire the way Folc moves confidently down the path. *He knows every twist and turn in the woods, like an animal of the forest,* you think.

He catches your eye and smiles, as if he knows what you are thinking. Your heart quickens, the same warmth of your first meeting rushing through you again.

Please turn to page 65.

You fire a peeved look at Edmond, who is perched confidently on the back of the dragonfly. *I'll go along with him this one time,* you think. *But if this turns out to be a mistake, it will be the last decision Edmond will ever make for me!*

"You win," you say, stretching your leg over the back of one of the luminous creatures. "Let's go."

The dragonfly takes off and soars gracefully into the night sky. You clasp your arms around its scaly neck, holding tightly. Up and up the insects climb, the whole swarm shining in the moonlight, and for the first time, you have a clear view of Lumanor's castle.

It is perched high above the winding trails, and its once grand sandstone walls and single tower are being eaten away by the veil of pink fog that surrounds it. The entire mountaintop is barren, left desolate by the dragon's deadly mist.

As you gaze at the eerie scene, the dragonflies dive down toward the castle, and suddenly your heart is gripped with fear.

"They're taking us to Lumanor!" you shout, trying to find Edmond's face through the sea of shimmering wings. "This has been a trick, after all!"

But instead of landing at the castle, they touch down before a huge stone building nearby. Carved into a sign above the double doors are great letters:

COURTHOUSE
LAND OF TARSIA

"This isn't the Academy of Magic!" cries Edmond, leaping off his dragonfly. But before he can move any farther two vicious creatures with piglike faces seize you both, dragging you inside the courthouse.

"Orcs!" you cry, trying to kick your way free.

"Watch it!" snorts an orc, twisting your arm so hard you wince. "Or you won't have your arm for long!"

As you stand still, held in place by the monster's grip, a bristle-haired half-orc rushes to your side.

"I'm Twiskus, your defense attorney," he growls, glaring at you from behind thick glasses.

"Defense attorney!" you cry. "What's going on?"

"You were found trespassing in the Land of Tarsia," he grunts, writing feverishly on a leaf of parchment.

"Now, just a minute," snaps Edmond, his eyes flashing. "We were given no warning"

"Doesn't matter!" snarls Twiskus. "Bring them inside!" He motions to the orcs, and they haul you into the courtroom, down the aisle.

You draw in a nervous breath as you see the benches are crowded with orcs, who leap to their feet as you enter, screaming, "Hang them!"

You shoot a look at Edmond and see that he's gone pale as a ghost.

"Silence!" hollers a squat half-orc at the front of the room. "Court is now in session! All rise as Judge Dourblood enters."

The clamor in the courtroom settles down a bit as a surly-faced orc in a white wig takes the stand. He shuffles through a pile of papers on his bench and then, with a nasty grunt, pitches the papers into the air. He glares down at you and Edmond, his shimmering pink eyes making you shudder with fear.

"I see you have no case," he snarls. "You're as good as dead!"

He turns away, shaking his jowls. "Members of the jury!" he bellows. "Retire to your chambers and come out only when you have arrived at a guilty verdict!"

"You can't do that!" you cry, trying to wrench your arm from the orc's grasp. "That's not fair!"

"You're out of order!" bellows the judge, his eyes popping out like pink globes. "Did you witness this outburst, members of the jury? Only a guilty and undesirable defendant would be so brazen!"

"Poll the jurors!" cries the mob in the courtroom.

At once the orcs in the jury box scramble to their feet, screaming, "Guilty, beyond a reasonable doubt!"

Your heart is gripped with fear as fierce-eyed, snorting orcs stampede down the center aisle to get their hands on you. Clubs fly and sticks shake and the courtroom is filled with wild shouts.

"Rip them apart! Tear them limb from limb! Hang them!" You kick and yank, trying to reach for your sword, but the more you fight, the tighter the orc guards hold onto you.

"Order!" bellows the judge, slamming his gavel. "Sit down, you orcs, or you'll get this gavel on your heads! Now, I'm in charge here, and even if I had no say in the jury's decision, I at least get a chance to sentence these criminals!"

You stare at the judge in disbelief.

"For your sentence," snorts Dourblood, "you shall be hanged in the courthouse square this very day!"

The orcs go wild, clapping, cheering, and stamping their feet. You feel your blood turn to ice.

Half your mind says, *No! No!* in disbelief. But with the other half you tell yourself, *I must think of something quick. There's got to be a way out of this!*

"Judge Dourblood," you shout boldly, over the noise of the courtroom, "We have done nothing wrong! And I intend to appeal this case to a higher court!"

The judge snorts and gurgles, and the courtroom grows quiet again. You spin around to your attorney. "We do have the right to appeal, don't we?" you ask.

Twiskus's face flushes with confusion. "Appeal?"

"Of course, you can appeal," grunts the judge, a grin sliding across his pig face. "And this very court, my brazen criminals, is the court of appeals!"

Edmond shoots you a horrified look, and the orcs howl with glee.

"Now, sentencing is much more stringent in a court of appeals," warns Dourblood, a gutteral giggle escaping from his throat. "But if you wish to appeal your case, it is your undeniable right."

What could be worse than hanging, you think, Then you ask,"May I speak with my codefendant, sir?"

"A last word? Certainly," gurgles Dourblood sweetly. He motions for the orc guards to free you.

"Edmond," you whisper, pulling him aside, "an appeal might give us time to find a way to escape."

"I think we should bribe Dourblood instead, Summer. I have your engagement ring with me. I'm sure the judge would set us free for a diamond of its value."

"Or," you say, laying your hand on Streak's hilt, "if we move fast, we could try to fight our way out."

Do you want to try to bribe the judge with the diamond ring? Turn to page 35.

Will you bide for time by appealing your case? Turn to page 14.

Or will you decide to fight your way out of the courtroom? Turn to page 41.

Maybe that magician can turn himself into a scaly dinosaur and a warty ogre but certainly never into such a strikingly handsome knight, you think. *And Streak will protect me if I'm wrong.*

You step out from behind the tree, and the knight's eyes widen in amazement.

"Whatever are you doing here in this barren land?" asks Sir Euston. "Such a beautiful damsel on a mountain of desolation! Please allow me to help you."

"I don't need help," you say. But your response does not come boldly. Your voice is quieted by the aura of strength and refinement that surrounds his armored figure.

The knight dismounts and walks to your side. He reaches toward you, and with a graceful bow, kisses the back of your hand. You draw in a little gasp of air.

"Please, milady, allow me to escort you home. Where do you live?"

"In Stonekin Hollow, kind sir," you say, charmed by his manner. "But I don't want to go home. I'm here for a reason."

"No reason is good enough for such a lovely lady to remain in Tarsia," he says gravely. "You see, this fog may look beautiful to you, sparkling like pink starlight, but it is deadly."

He leans toward you, and his breath is warm and sweet as he whispers in your ear. "Those patches of mist you see are the Moon Dragon's breath, which kills all beautiful living things. The things a lady loves best—flowers and fireflies, songbirds and butterflies. We must speed you away at once!"

You take a step back and speak gently, not wanting to insult this well-meaning knight. "I know all about

the fog, Sir Euston," you tell him. "And I am in Tarsia to put an end to Lumanor's destruction."

The knight's green eyes darken with worry. "No, milady, that is my job. I am a well-trained warrior, a certified Knight of Argent. I came a great distance, across the Hills of Hitherock, through the Valley of Glardale, to defeat the Moon Dragon. The beast will be dead by the next moonrise, without fail."

You glance from the knight's lance to his filigreed silver-handled sword. You shake your head.

"Sir Euston, it is I who carry the magic sword, the only sword capable of slaying the great beast."

The knight's intent gaze doesn't change. "The victory does not rest on the weapons," he says, "but on the ability of the warrior. You are much too lovely to attempt what, for you, would be impossible. Please, milady, I beg of you, let me take you home. Let me battle the dragon. And tomorrow, I will return to Stonekin Hollow, to bring you the claw of the beast."

You stare into his clear eyes, a flicker of doubt beginning to nag you. *He's certainly self-assured,* you think, *far more than I am. And after all, he is a true knight.* You sigh. *Maybe he is the one who can slay the Moon Dragon.*

Will you let Sir Euston take you home, planning to return to Tarsia should he fail? Turn to page 13.

Should you ask him to join you, so you can battle the dragon together? Turn to page 26.

Or will you take leave of the knight and continue on your way? Turn to page 60.

"Mother," you say quietly. "I must go." Then, glancing at Edmond, you take note of his mischievous grin and add, "And I must go alone."

"Alone?" cries Lady Mertice. "But why?"

"After all, how will you bring your slain dragon back here? It'd make a fine statue," quips Edmond.

"It's his sarcasm that convinces me I'd be better off without him, Mother," you moan. You shoot a sharp look at Edmond. "You're not committed to saving our Hollow, and I don't believe you ever will be."

"No, Summer," Edmond replies, his face now serious. "I'm committed to staying alive. And I think you should be, too. Just running off, asking to be killed, doesn't seem too intelligent to me!"

"I'm not just 'running off'!" you fume. "I'm a trained fighter, and I feel a responsibility to save Stonekin Hollow, even if you don't."

"Oh, Summer!" wails Lady Mertice. She wipes big tears with her handkerchief. "Can't you see how painful it is for me to let you risk your life?"

You wrap your arms around your mother's shoulders.

"You take after your grandmother, all right," she says. "And I can't blame you for that. Just don't let your stubbornness get in the way of clear thinking, dear. That may have been Grandma Millicent's downfall."

"I'll be careful, Mother," you whisper. You bend down and kiss her forehead.

"Godspeed, my daughter," she says, hugging you tightly. "I only pray you will come back alive."

"Well," says Edmond, tapping his foot irritably. "This evening certainly turned out differently from

what I'd planned." He fingers a small jewelry pouch that contains your engagement ring.

Then, with a sudden surge of emotion, he adds, "Please take care of yourself for me, Summer."

"I will," you reply, surprised at his seriousness.

You tighten the straps of your knapsack and leave through the side door, heading for the high stone wall that surrounds Tarsia Mountain, your eyes following the twisted passages that lead up to Perched Castle. You duck through the gateway in the wall and enter the kingdom, an eerie feeling gripping your heart.

This is it, you tell yourself. *I'm finally here. There's no turning back now.* You grasp Streak's pearl handle and raise your head to the rising moon.



Suddenly a figure, black and forboding, flashes across the moon. You draw in a quick breath of night air to calm your racing heart. It is the Moon Dragon,

its silhouette awesome, its great wings flapping, as it sails across the face of the moon.

Fear serves no purpose, you tell yourself, wiping your moist palms on your pants leg. *The best antidote to fear is a good strategy.*

My first move, you plan, watching the dragon fly off into the night sky, *is to find the Academy of Magic. There I can learn about the monster's magical powers.*

You trudge up the winding trail past bare trees where the dragon's poisonous pink mist lingers in the topmost branches. A sudden rustling of dry leaves in the dark woods to your left makes you stop, your mind frozen. As you spin toward the sound, a silvery beast lunges at you, its eyes glistening in the moonlight.

With lightning swiftness, you draw your sword and duck to the ground. The animal leaps over your back. Whirling around, you raise your sword high to bring it down on the head of your attacker.

"Stop, Jarlath!" shouts a voice from the woods.

Whoosh! your blade is stopped in midair, and the animal, a timber wolf, its back streaked in silver, moves off down the trail. You struggle to free your blade from whatever force is holding it, but it remains caught in the air, not budging.

"You're quite a swordswoman," comes a voice from behind. "That blow would have put an end to my best friend."

Now a young man, bearded and burly, moves to your side, and with a touch of his hand he frees Streak from the air. He strides over to the wolf, stroking its neck gently.

"I must apologize for Jarlath," he says. "He smelled a stranger and got a little carried away."

The man looks directly into your eyes, and you take a quick breath, overcome by the darkness of his gaze in the moonlight. His large frame is clad in leather and fur, and there is a magnetism about him, a wildness like the timber wolf at his side.

"You must be a magician," you say, trying to keep your composure. "You stopped my blade in midair."

"Yes," answers the man, his gaze still focused on you. "I'm called Folc. I live here on Tarsia Mountain. You've already met Jarlath."

I expected Tarsians to be hostile and distant, all under the influence of the Moon Dragon, you think. *But despite his rough exterior, this Tarsian has a kindness in his gaze, a calmness in his movements.*

"My name is Summer," you tell him, suddenly embarrassed to realize your sword is pointed straight at him. You smile apologetically and replace Streak in its sheath. "I'm from the Hollow."

"You're very brave, Summer," he says. "No strangers are bold enough to roam through Tarsia, especially at night, when the Moon Dragon soars the skies." Folc's fingers move to his beard and he strokes it thoughtfully.

"Why have you come to Tarsia?" he asks then.

You keep silent, your eyes scanning this mountain man, his tousled curls, his thick beard, his mysterious eyes. *Is he trustworthy?* you wonder.

"Strangers visit Tarsia for two reasons," he continues, watching you closely. "Either because they are curious about the strange and beautiful pink mist, or—" his glance shifts to your sword— "or because they want to destroy the Moon Dragon."

"I see," you murmur, still reluctant to tell this stran-

ger your reasons for undertaking such a dangerous journey.

"You nearly killed Jarlath," he says then. "Your sword is swift. Swift enough, perhaps, to fell a dragon."

You are silent, and Folc nods, as if he understands.

"It is unwise to talk here, Summer," he says, his eyes peering into the forest. "I live through the woods, overlooking the Tarsian Sea. Why don't you come to my home, where we can speak freely?"

I need a magician to help me in my quest, you think. *But the power of his eyes, his mysterious gentleness, stir me in a way I have never felt before. Not even with Edmond.*

My attraction to this man is very strong. Perhaps too strong, you think. It is so sudden and overwhelming that you wonder if this magician has woven a spell to draw you in.

Folc's long fingers stroke the silver streak on Jarlath's back.

"Since I am a magician and you are a fighter," he says quietly, "together, we may have great strength." He looks up, waiting for your answer.

Will you turn down his invitation and head for the Academy of Magic? Turn to page 121.

Or will you decide to go with Folc to discuss your quest? Turn to page 61.

You drop to your knees next to the couch and wrap your arms around your mother. She is sobbing uncontrollably now, and you can't bear to cause her such pain.

"I'll do as you wish, mother," you whisper. "I won't put my life in jeopardy."

"Oh, thank you, dear. Thank you," she cries, hugging you tightly.

"Why, that's great news, Summer!" says Edmond with a smile. He reaches into his doublet pocket and pulls out an enormous diamond. "For my betrothed," he announces, slipping the ring onto your finger.

You turn to the window, staring out at Tarsia Mountain. How many hours of your childhood had you spent, dreaming of conquering what no man had been able to do? How many times had you envisioned the scene of victory, when you would be renowned as a fine and accomplished dragonslayer?

Well, it was only a dream, you think. *And perhaps I would have failed miserably had I tried.*

But you are not convinced. Your heart is aching as you turn back to Edmond, whose eyes are dancing brightly, though his brow furrows with concern.

"What's the matter, Summer?" he asks. "Don't you like the ring?"

"Oh, yes," you answer, glancing down at it again. "It's beautiful."

Perhaps one day I can convince Edmond how important this quest is for me, you think. But for now, you know you must set your sword and your sunbeams aside, for your journey to Tarsia has come to

THE END

You toss Edmond to the floor, and his furry little body scurries off to a corner as you pull your sunbeams from your knapsack.

"Give up my sword, you monster? Never!" you cry. You fling the cover off the jar and hurl the sunbeams into Lumanor's face. "I will not be tricked by you!"

Your heart thunders in your chest as the dragon bellows in rage, flailing his great wings against the stone walls. He rears toward the ceiling of the chamber, blindly whipping his claws through the air, thrashing his moon-globed tail wildly.

The sunbeams are working just as your grandmother told you they would. The brightness blinds Lumanor's eyes while the energy of the sun weakens his powers.

"I'll destroy you!" he wails, descending toward you, his luminous wings beating. You duck beneath the huge wing, drawing your blade, and come up under the beast with a swipe across his scaly belly.

Lumanor rears back again, this time in pain, blood spurting from the gaping wound.

With a great cry, the monster dives at you again, knocking you to the floor with his claw. You roll quickly to the left, dodging his dripping fangs.

Suddenly Jarlath lunges toward the beast, anxious to settle an old score. But Lumanor sweeps him away with his wing as if the wolf were a bothersome insect.

Then the beast sweeps around to face you, his moon-pale eyes clear of the sunbeams now.

"You are mine, now. You cannot resist the power of Lumanor," he chants, staring into your eyes. But though you feel a stong force drawing you in, you feel the amulet Folc gave you protecting you from Lumanor's hypnotic gaze.

Angered that his spell has no effect on you, the dragon bellows, "So, you will not be hypnotized. Then your fate will be far worse. You are finished, dissident!"

Shaking with terror, you take Streak with both hands and start to swing it back and forth before you.

"Ha!" Lumanor laughs, mockingly. "Do you think you and your puny weapon can fell the Moon Dragon?" And with a cry, he breathes a great cloud of pink mist into your face.

Holding your breath, you try to dodge the poisonous vapors, when suddenly a great wind rushes through the room, sweeping it clear of the deadly fog.

And then you see the crescent moon, drawing closer as the dragon approaches. Gripping Streak with both hands, and mustering all your strength, you lunge toward the dragon's throat. Your sword plunges deep just as another cloud of fog descends upon you.

Your heart is throbbing in your temples as you draw back on your sword to see that it is glistening with a strange, cool glow.

It found its mark, you say to yourself, collapsing to the floor in exhaustion as the fog dissipates from the chamber. And there lies the dragon, cold and scaly, gradually dissolving into a pink-colored gas.

"You've done it," Folc says quietly, sitting down beside you. He lifts a strand of hair trailing on your forehead and brushes it back off your face. The dark crystals of his eyes are bright with admiration.

"No, Folc," you murmur. "We've done it. If you hadn't cleared the fog with that magical breeze, I never would have seen the crescent moon at the dragon's throat."

Folc takes your hands and you both rise to your feet, smiling.

"Edmond!" you remember suddenly. The rabbit is cowering in a corner, his blue eyes watching you.

"Ah, yes," says Folc, trying to hide the irritation in his voice. "Edmond."

In a bright flash of amber light, Edmond is back, velvet doublet and all. He is blustering angrily.

"I can't say I've ever had an appreciation for magic," he huffs, brushing off his trousers. "And now I seem to have an outright hatred of it!"

"Sorry, Edmond," says Folc, dropping his eyes.

Edmond turns to you. "Well, Summer, I see that you have won more than one victory," he says quietly. "Not only have you felled the dragon, but it seems that Folc's heart has fallen at your feet, too."

"Edmond," you say, "I really appreciate—"

"No, Summer," he interrupts. "You'd never be happy with me. You'd always be committed to some goal, and I need a girl who will be committed only to me."

Edmond puts his arm around your shoulders and walks you over to Folc.

"Only a magician could handle you, Summer," he says.

"Actually," says Folc, "I think Summer may be better at weaving spells than I am. Her Enchant Person Spell is very effective."

Then, right in front of Edmond, Folc cups your chin in his hands and kisses you. There is a warm spiciness in the taste of his mouth, a magic in his touch, and you are lost for a moment, wrapped in a strange new world.

Then suddenly you hear clapping and shouting, and

you pull away from Folc. A crowd has gathered around you, buzzing with excitement.

"The prisoners from the dragon's crater," cries Folc.

"Grandma Millicent!" you cry, seeing her make her way through the crowd. Her skin is drawn, thin as parchment, across her strong bones. Her flowered dress is frayed at the cuffs and seams. But her chin is held high and her amethyst eyes gleam with pride.

"Oh, Summer!" she says, hugging you tightly. "Did you do it? Was it you who slew the dragon?"

"Yes," you answer proudly. You hold her in your arms for a long moment, amazed, and thankful, that she is still alive.

"I knew you would do it," she whispers. "All these months, I kept telling the other prisoners, 'When the time is right, Summer will conquer the dragon.' I always had faith."

Over her shoulder, you see Folc watching you. "Grandma," you say. "I want you to meet the magician who helped me."

Folc comes over, smiling brightly, and wraps his arms around you both.

"I'd say we should get your grandmother back to the Hollow," he says. "I'm sure she's anxious to see your mother."

He motions to Edmond, and you all link arms. Folc grasps Jarlath by the nape of his neck and closes his eyes, murmuring words of magic, and soon you are all enveloped in a bright cloud, appearing triumphantly in the clear evening air of Stonekin Hollow.

THE END



No! you scold yourself. *I believe I am the swordswoman destined to slay Lumanor, and I won't allow a handsome knight to dissuade me from my goal.*

"Thank you for your offer," you tell Sir Euston politely, "but I really don't need to be rescued and carried home. I prefer to stay in Tarsia and complete my quest."

The knight shakes his head sadly. "I have done my duty, milady," he says. "I have tried to save your life. But if you feel you must be so stubborn, then I will just be on my way."

He lifts your hand to his lips once again, giving you a farewell kiss. "I shall reach Perched Castle before you, milady. The dragon will be destroyed by the time you arrive. Just be careful of the dangers along the way, won't you?"

"Thank you, Sir Euston," you say. "Good-bye."

"Farewell," he says, and he remounts and gallops up the path on his white steed. You shake your head as you watch him disappear toward the crumbling sandstone castle. Somehow you feel you will never see him again, that he is riding to his end.

Now, where do I go from here? you think. *There must be someone besides Folc who can help me with magical assistance.*

Please turn to page 21.

It can't hurt me just to talk to him, you think. *If I sense I'm in danger, I'll find out what I need to know about the dragon and then be on my way.*

"Perhaps you're right," you say. "It's best to talk elsewhere."

"Good," he answers, his brown eyes glistening in the moonlight. "Jarlath will lead the way."

You wind through the woods, onto the starlit path by the sea, until you soon are entering a small cottage through a wooden door ornamented with a wolf-head knocker. Inside is a cozy room, its walls lined with bookshelves. A great oak table in the corner holds jars of herbs and strange plants.

"Ingredients for my magic," Folc explains, seeing the curious look on your face. He crosses to the hearth then and builds a fire that crackles brightly and burns the dampness off the mountain night.

"You seem to be an excellent swordswoman," he says, hanging a black kettle over the fire. He shoots a glance at you. "Where did you get your magic sword?"

"How did you know it's magic?" you ask in surprise."

"I've dreamt of that sword many times," he says quietly. "It's the only sword that is capable of killing Lumanor." He rubs his fingers across his lips, a puzzled look in his gaze.

"I hope you're not offended," he says, "but I always expected the fighter carrying that sword would be a . . . well, a man. A heavily armored knight, perhaps, or a massive warrior."

You set your shoulders and raise your chin defiantly. "So you don't think I'm a strong enough fighter, is that it?" you ask.

"No, no, not at all," says Folc, shaking his head. "You're a pleasant surprise."

You are pleased by the compliment but feel your cheeks glowing red, and you're glad to see Folc turn away to check the kettle.

He ladles steaming stew into two clay bowls and places them on the table before you.

"How did you become a fighter, Summer?" he asks, leaning across the table, an intent look on his face.

"I've always loved to watch good swordsmen," you say, "ever since I was little. After much pleading, I finally convinced Boronovich, the great fighter of the lowlands, to give me lessons when I was only eight. My mother didn't know, of course."

"But does she now?" he asks.

"Yes, and I guess she's finally resigned herself to the idea that I'm truly a fine fighter and must use the talent I have. I'm pretty stubborn, and she knows I'd never give it up."

You look at the firelight flickering across Folc's face and feel very glad that you came to talk to him. *Edmond would never ask me about my fighting abilities,* you think. *He doesn't really take me seriously.*

"And you, Folc," you ask then. "How did you decide to become a magician?"

"It's not an exciting story," he says. "Just a small and simple one. Unimportant, really."

"I'd like to hear it," you say. "Tell me."

He leans back in his chair, his eyes scanning the ceiling, as if he were trying to recreate the memory.

"When I was little," he says, "I loved to pick the mountain flowers. There were tiny violets that covered the hills and I would secretly collect them and stash

them in my pockets so the other boys wouldn't make fun of me."

You smile at this burly mountain man, who is talking so freely about flowers. *Edmond would never even notice violets,* you think.

"I would carry them with me all day and then rush home at night with bulging pockets to give my mother my present. But when I pulled them out, the violets would be wilted, all drooping in my hand."

He looks at you, his eyes bright and shy, as if he is laughing at himself. "You think I'm too sentimental?" he asks.

"Oh, no," you assure him. "I think your story is wonderful. Tell me more."

"I wished so much that I could bring the flowers back to life. I wanted to see my mother's face glow with wonder, the way I felt mine did when I first plucked the violets from the mountaintop. So, I decided to learn magic."

"To make your life more beautiful," you add.

"I suppose," Folc says. He clasps his hands on the table and drops his eyes. You feel he is still a little embarrassed to be showing so much sensitivity.

"So I went to the Magicians' School in Dromigall to find out if I really had magical abilities. And, I couldn't believe it, but I did!"

"Folc," you say, "there are a lot of boys in the Hollow like the boys in your story. They are afraid to show that they are touched by beautiful things. I think it's wonderful that you can say out loud that you love violets."

Your eyes meet Folc's again, and you feel as you have never felt with Edmond. The brightness of his

gaze seems to travel right through your veins, and you want to reach across the table and take his hand in yours, feel the gentleness of his touch.

You stand up suddenly, shocked at your own feelings. *I'm all but engaged to Edmond,* you tell yourself. *And I have no right to be thinking such thoughts about a perfect stranger.*

"Well," you say, setting your napkin down on the table. "I really must be on my way. Thank you for supper."

"On your way?" asks Folc, stunned. "But I thought . . . I thought we were going to work out a strategy. I thought . . ."

When his eyes meet yours, you know you want to stay. *But if I stay,* you think, *it must be for the right reason. It must be because he is a magician who will help make my quest a success. It can't be because of my feelings. I haven't time for that now.*

Should I just come right out and tell him what's on my mind? you wonder. *Or will he think I'm being silly? Childish, even? Or should I just leave, and find a magician who won't complicate my goal with romantic feelings?*

"Must you go, Summer?" Folc asks.

What is your decision?

If you leave to find a magician who won't be a romantic problem for you, turn to page 37.

If you stay, being honest with Folc about your feelings, turn to page 130.

You travel for a long time, following Jarlath along the twisted forest path, up the walled trail, into a rough, rocky area of the mountain. Soon you duck into an opening in the rock, and the cavern inside is cool and dark.

"Watch these rocks," warns Folc. "They're slippery."

You scramble over the rocks behind Folc, and suddenly you stop dead in your tracks. Far in the darkness beyond, you see the glitter of amber eyes, hundreds of eyes, it seems, staring at you.

"Quick!" you whisper. "Get up against the wall, Folc!" You plaster yourself against the cave wall, feeling for your sword.

You hear a quiet chuckle in the darkness. It is Folc, and he takes your hand gently, pulling you back into the tunnel.

"Take it easy, Summer," he says. "Those eyes belong to the wolves, not to goblins or some other evil creatures."

You heave a sigh of relief, feeling a little embarrassed about your overreaction. *But it doesn't hurt to be cautious,* you tell yourself.

"Jarlath is toward the end of the tunnel already," says Folc. "We have to catch up to him."

You move ahead and can hear one of the wolves talking to Jarlath in a gritty, gutteral language.

"I can understand what they're saying," says Folc. "But I can't speak their language, no matter how hard I've tried."

"Tell me what they're talking about," you whisper.

"Jarlath is explaining who you are," he says. The wolves turn toward you in unison. In the darkness you

can see their eyes calmly examining you. Then they turn back to talk with Jarlath.

"They've agreed to show us the secret passage that leads to the dragon's treasure room," says Folc. "We must promise, though, to give them a share of the treasure—if we're victorious. The dragon has stolen many valuables from these wolves."

"Of course, we will," you say. "I don't care about the treasure, only the victory."

Folc nods, and the wolves lead you through a twisted cave passage that leads to a wet tunnel. They go no farther, making way for you to pass by.

"This is it," says Folc. "We're on our own now."

Turning to Jarlath, he says, "Stay with the pack and wait until I come back for you. I don't want to put your life in jeopardy a second time."

The timber wolf lets out a whine, but Folc pats his head and turns back toward the tunnel. "Ready, Summer?" he asks.

"Ready, Folc."

As you enter the dark passage, your palms begin to sweat. *This is it,* you think, knowing how near you are to the dragon. *There's no backing out now. I must be confident, no matter how frightened I feel.*

Suddenly you feel a strange surge of energy whirring through the tunnel. A great wind draws you ahead, surrounds you, pulls you toward a door at the end of the passage.

"Folc!" you scream, trying to hold onto the wall. "What's happening?"

Before Folc can answer, a deafening laugh rings in your ears.

"Come to me!" it howls. "Come to your dragon!"

You are sucked from the tunnel right through the doorway and into the treasure room. There stands the dragon, his great wings outstretched, his pink-threaded eyes glowing. Blue scales cover his body, and he curls his tail menacingly.

Surrounding the beast are mounds of glittering sapphires and emeralds and rubies, shields and swords, golden chalices and ornate scepters, all shining brightly through the thin pink fog that veils the room.

"So you thought you would surprise me?" howls the beast, his fangs glistening. "Well, I prefer to be the one who does the surprising." He throws back his head in evil laughter. "Just look at you tremble! You are such helpless little fools!"

His words make you bristle. You glare at this murderous beast, who has stolen all these treasures from innocent Tarsians, who dares to call you names.

"You're not as invulnerable as you may think!" you hiss. "And you will never conquer my Hollow!"

With that, you point Streak at the monster and circle the room, your magic blade glowing brightly.

"You child!" Lumanor howls, mockingly. "How foolish you look, wielding that puny sword!"

He swipes his great wing across your arm, knocking Streak from your grasp. You stagger back against the wall.

"Now, little girl," he chides, "since you seem so determined to fight me, you will have your chance. This evening you will battle me in the arena, in front of all Tarsia. And then," he snarls, "I will do more than make you look foolish. Then I will destroy you!"

With that, the beast seizes each of you with a great claw and carries you through passage after passage of

the castle until you reach a cold cramped room in the tower. There he pitches you to the stone floor.

"Here you will stay until moonrise," he growls. "But first, hand over your sunbeams."

You stare at the beast in confusion.

"Do you think that I, the powerful Lumanor, would not detect the magic of the Tarsian sunbeams in your knapsack?" The dragon's horrible laugh rumbles the walls and floor of the small chamber, as he sweeps a massive claw to tear the knapsack from your back.

"Of course, I'll return the sword to you in the arena. In your frail hands it is nothing but a worthless toy!" sneers Lumanor.

"Until moonrise," howls the beast, locking you in.

Despair suddenly overwhelms you. "We're doomed!" you cry, slumping to the floor.

"We'll think of something," says Folc. "After all, we have plenty of time to make another plan."

But you aren't convinced. You think of the monstrous dragon, ten times your size. *And Lumanor is right,* you think. *Streak is nothing but a puny blade next to that giant dragon. It's impossible!* you think in panic. You cover your eyes with your hands and lean over your knees.

"I can't do it, Folc!" you cry. "I haven't got a chance against that powerful beast!"

You hear Folc's footsteps crossing the stone floor toward you, and then he sits down, his shoulder touching yours.

"Do you know that you remind me of a flower?" he asks. "A roseroot."

"Oh, please, Folc!" you cry. "Don't start talking about flowers when I'm about to be massacred!"

"It's a very special flower that grows high in the mountains, beneath the snow," he says, ignoring your interruption. "Its petals are pale gold, like your curls. And it looks very delicate—"

"Delicate?" you moan. "I wouldn't exactly call myself delicate."

"Oh, but this flower only looks delicate," he says, taking your chin into his hand, and lifting it gently from your knees. His thumb traces over your lips.



"The roseroot is deceptive. It's really one of the strongest of all flowers, blooming brightly and beautifully in the coldest snow."

You can't help but smile.

"Your strength of heart is beautiful to me," Folc says then. "Be strong, Summer. Know that you have the power to win this battle."

The warmth of his breath on your face seems to melt right through you. He moves his lips toward you and

brushes them across yours, gently at first, then harder, until you close your eyes and kiss him, a long kiss that you wish would never end.

Then he pulls you close, and you bury your head in his neck, resting there for a long time, smelling the warm spiciness of his skin.

After a while, the nervousness of your impending confrontation returns, and you lift your head, an emptiness fluttering in your stomach. "Folc," you say, "we'd better talk about what we're going to do."

"I suppose so," says Folc. He slips his hand from your shoulder reluctantly. "The way I see it," he says slowly, "we have two options.

"The dragon is weaker during sunlit hours and so always sleeps through midday. Using my magic to escape from this tower, we could surprise the beast and try to slay him in his sleep. I'm certain Streak and your sunbeams will be with the dragon. The beast wouldn't let them out of his sight." Folc pauses a moment.

"However," he continues, "there are ways of distracting the dragon when it is performing in a crowd. I really think you could win, in front of all of Tarsia, if we wait till moonrise. I can help you with a Light Spell, give you extra power with a Strength Spell, do what I can to assist you."

The light shines through the tower window, and you know it must be midday now. You must decide quickly.

If you think it best to attack the dragon while he's sleeping, turn to page 107.

If you decide to battle the dragon in the arena, turn to page 93.

I can't hurt Edmond by telling him about Folc, you think. *Besides, these romantic feelings I have for the magician will disappear in time.*

You return to the Hollow with Edmond, and the next day, you meet with Widahl in his tree-stump home.

"Even I do not have the power it would take to battle the Moon Dragon," the old gnome wheezes. "And I am as strong a magician as you will find anywhere. But be consoled by the fact that I can ward off the dragon's poisonous fog from the Hollow. As long as I live, you will be free from the evil pink dust."

"If Widahl can protect us from harm," Edmond tells you on the way home, "then there is no urgency for you to risk your life against the dragon."

Your heart grows sad. "I suppose not," you say. "And, yet, one day, the gnome will be dead, and then . . ."

"We can cross that bridge when we come to it," says Edmond, with an air of finality. "And now," he adds, flashing a smile, "you can think about marrying me."

After several months have passed, you finally yield to your mother's wishes and marry Edmond.

Over the years, you rarely think about Folc. But you keep your violets pressed between the pages of a book of poetry. Once in a great while, when the moon is full, you open the book. But when you touch the violets, they no longer spring to life as they once did.

But in those days, you tell yourself, there was magic in the air, and you believed what no longer seems possible. You believed you had the power to make dreams come true, to forge untrodden paths, to become a triumphant dragonslayer, renowned throughout the land.

THE END

The victory is what's important, you decide. *And if, for any reason, my weapons should fail, I'd have no backup.* You are already winding back down the path toward the place where Folc said his cottage was. *With Folc's magic and my weapons,* you think, *the Moon Dragon will have a mighty battle to fight!*

You travel through the dark woods, until you are on the other side of the mountain, where the Tarsian Sea crashes far below the deserted village. *How will I know which cottage is Folc's?* you wonder.

Just then you see Jarlath sitting before a tiny building set back from the others. His silver-streaked



back is lustrous in the moonlight. You move your hand to Streak's hilt and approach cautiously. The wolf doesn't move, watching you calmly with gleaming eyes.

"Folc!" you call softly, trying not to alarm the animal. "Folc!"

"Come in," calls Folc's voice from inside the door. You carefully step around the wolf and push the door open. Folc is reading in a chair by the hearth, the firelight glowing on his bearded face.

"Summer!" he says, not bothering to hide the plea-

sure in his voice. He sets down his book and motions to the chair across from him.

"I'm glad you came. Come and sit down."

A familiar feeling rises in you, flushing the surface of your skin. *It's just what I felt when I first saw him on the trail,* you think. *His dark eyes seem to draw me in.*

Quickly you glance away, taking in the stone walls, the bookshelves, the jars of herbs on the corner table. But the feeling doesn't go away. It's a warmth, a melting, as if the glow of the fire has permeated your bloodstream. *Why don't I feel this way with Edmond?* you wonder.

A sudden thought freezes your heart. *Could Folc be under the hypnotic spell of the Moon Dragon? Perhaps that's the reason for his magnetism. Perhaps that's why I feel the way I do when I'm near him.*

"Folc," you say casually, pretending to scan the titles on his leather-bound books. "How does it feel when the Moon Dragon hypnotizes you?"

You watch his reaction from the corner of your eye, brushing a wisp of blonde hair from your line of vision. His dark brows furrow together, and he runs a finger across his lips.

"I'm not sure, Summer," he says. "I would imagine it is a coolness, perhaps a sense of hollowness . . ."

"How do you know that?" you ask, still watching closely.

"That's the feeling inside the castle," he says. "You enter a kind of vacuum where sound is muffled, and an eerie coolness creeps into your bones."

"Do you like the feeling?" you ask then.

Folc jumps to his feet suddenly, pacing the stone floor restlessly.

"Do I like the feeling?" he explodes. "I hate it! I hate the dragon! That dragon murdered my brother, Summer! Over a year ago. And he has turned my homeland into a nightmare of evil and deadly pink fog."

He whirls around to you then, catching your eyes with a fierce, direct look. "Is that why you came, Summer? To see if I pay homage to that treacherous monster?"

"I came for help, Folc," you say quickly, trying to dispel the agitated feelings you've caused to surface. "I want to slay the dragon. I had no idea about your brother. I'm very sorry . . . I just . . ."

He runs both hands roughly through his curls, shaking his head. "I'm sorry, too," he says. "It's a very emotional subject for me. But tell me, what makes you so daring? Why would you be willing to risk your life when you're not even a Tarsian?"

"The dragon is expanding his territory toward Stonekin Hollow," you explain. "And I've just discovered that my grandmother is Lumanor's prisoner."

"Your grandmother?" asks Folc.

"She was carried away by a group of elves, right out of her garden."

"I remember that!" says Folc. "I remember hearing about a woman kidnapped from Stonekin Hollow."

Folc rushes toward you, grasping your hand. He pulls you to the table by the hearth.

"Sit down, Summer," he says excitedly. "We have plans to make. You're bold and determined and a good fighter. I'm tired of the persecution and am a fine magician. I think we have a good chance against that beast."

Watching Folc's eyes shine and feeling his hand touching yours makes your mind wander for a

moment, as if your heart is controlling it. The fire is bright, and your hand is warm, and Folc's eyes are kind and deep. . . .

Folc takes his hand from yours and brushes it across your cheek, as if he knows what you are feeling. The smell of herbs and spices rises from his skin, and you gaze into his eyes.

"We must make our plans," you say quietly, trying to force your mind back to your quest.

"Yes," he agrees. He moves his hand slowly from your face, and you see it is hard for him, too, to concentrate. He looks away, into the blazing flames.

"We can't make a move until daylight," he says, "when the dragon is most vulnerable. So we should plan our strategy now and take care of the details in the morning."

"And tomorrow," you say, your mind back on the quest, "tomorrow the Moon Dragon will breathe the last of its deadly pink smoke."

Please turn to page 83.

It is Folc, his powerful, leather-clad figure a welcome sight in the courthouse doorway. One look at him, standing so strong, his wolf at his side, brings back a surge of the same feeling you had in the woods when you met him. You feel drawn to him, as if you and he are the only two people in all Tarsia.

"We have no time to waste!" he warns. Edmond grabs your hand and jerks you over the snoring mob, out the door, and down a wooded trail after Folc.

Within minutes, you are entering a cozy, candle-lit dwelling built into the rocks over the Tarsian Sea.

"Make yourselves comfortable," says Folc. He crosses to the hearth and builds a blazing fire that casts a warm glow on the stone walls. You settle into a big armchair, breathing a sigh of relief at being away from the terror of the courthouse.

"So you're a magician," says Edmond. He is sitting on the edge of a wooden chair, looking impeccably groomed and unruffled, even after the uproar of the day. "How did you know we were in trouble?"

Folc crosses to the window next to you, and a warm scent of herbs and spices fills your head. *What a wonderful smell,* you think. *So mysterious . . .*

"I meant it when I said there is danger on this mountain," says Folc, "Especially at night. That's when the great powers of the Moon Dragon are most intense."

"Well, we appreciate what you did for us," says Edmond. "We were as good as dead when those orcs came after us with those clubs."

Folc moves toward the fire, leaning on the stone slab above the hearth. "You're right," he says quietly. "And unless you have a very good reason to remain in Tarsia, I suggest we get you back to the Hollow as soon as pos-

sible. After today, Lumanor will be soaring the skies, searching for you."

"But we can't go back already!" you cry, jumping from your chair. "My quest has just begun!"

"Your quest . . ." says Folc, running a finger across his lips. He stares into your eyes as if searching for the rest of the sentence.

"You are an expert swordswoman," he ponders. "Your skill was evident at the courthouse. And you're traveling with a backpack and . . . something magical. I'm not sure what it is, but I pick up magic. . . ."

"Tarsian sunbeams," you tell him.

"Ah, sunbeams," says Folc, stroking his beard, his eyes shimmering. "But you didn't mention your sword, Summer. I know that sword. It's a sword of powerful magic."

He looks directly into your eyes then, his gaze piercing. "You've come to Tarsia to slay the Moon Dragon, haven't you?"

"Yes, I have," you say, amazed. "But how do you know about my sword?"

"I've dreamt of it many times," he says. "In my dream, I travel with the fighter who carries that pearl-handled sword, and together, we slay the dragon."

"That's enough!" cries Edmond, leaping to his feet. "Don't encourage her! After we nearly lost our lives in that courtroom, it's clear that Summer and I should be going back home while we're still able."

"Edmond!" you cry. "You want to give up already?"

"Well, I must admit," says Folc, "I was a little surprised that . . . I mean, I always imagined the magic sword would be carried by . . . a man, I suppose. A trained knight or a massive warrior, in heavy armor.

Lumanor will destroy all but the strongest and most skilled."

"You see, Summer?" says Edmond, pleased to find someone who agrees with him.

"I happen to be the finest fighter in the lowlands!" you protest. "The fact that I am a woman doesn't matter!"

"Quite," agrees Folc. "You're absolutely right." He clasps his hands together and runs his thumbs across his lips. His eyes don't leave yours for a moment. "But Edmond is right, too. If you don't go home now, there is no guarantee that you will ever go home alive."

Edmond crosses to take your hand in his. "I think we've experienced enough of Tarsia today to last a lifetime. I'm sure Folc knows of another fighter who could take your magic sword and slay the dragon. A man, Summer. A Tarsian warrior, perhaps, who has a better chance against the dragon."

You look toward Folc. "Is that true?" you ask. "Do you know of someone better qualified than I am to fight Lumanor?"

"I don't know how qualified you are, Summer," he replies. "You are the best judge of your skill."

"But if Summer were to leave her sword with you," asks Edmond, "you would surely know of some fighter who would use it to slay the dragon. Right?"

Folc nods slowly. "I know of many," he says.

Edmond looks into your eyes, his face grave.

"Summer," he says, "You made only one promise to your mother. You promised to come back alive."

It's true, you think. *I did promise to be careful. And if Folc knows of a fighter who could use my sword, well, perhaps I should go home, before it's too late.*

You touch your hand to Streak's hilt. *But how can I leave Streak in the hands of someone else?* you think. *Who could use its power better than I?*

Edmond crosses to the door, shooting a sharp glance toward you. "Summer, there are people we love waiting for us in Stonekin Hollow. I'm going back. Are you coming with me?"

If you stay with Folc and try to slay the dragon, turn to page 119.

If you decide to go back with Edmond, leaving Streak in Folc's hands, turn to page 82.

A monster would never say "Kill us both," and sacrifice his own life, you think. *Those words would come only from the mouth of the real Folc.*

With lightning swiftness, you draw your blade and leap toward the approaching Folc. But he flattens to the ground to avoid your blow and dives toward you, grabbing your legs. With a powerful thrust, he tosses you onto Folc's oak table.

Magical ingredients fly through the air, jars crash to the stony floor, glass shatters against the walls. You kick your way out of the monster's grasp and jump to your feet on the table, sending a clay pot flying into the doppleganger's face. He staggers back from the blow, and just then, Folc trips him, and he crashes to the floor, facedown.

Instantly, you leap off the table, plunging your blade into the monster's back. He lets out a howl. Don't strike me again!" he screams. "I am the real Folc!"

But soon his cries fade away, and he lies lifeless on the stony floor. Then, right before your eyes, the monster disintegrates into a pale pink fog.

"He was sent by Lumanor, wasn't he, Folc?" you ask, your voice trembling, your eyes pinned to the spot where the doppleganger disappeared.

"I'm sure of it," says Folc, his voice quiet. He turns to you. "Thank you for saving my life, Summer." And as he looks deep into your eyes he says, "Now, I have something that may save yours someday."

He crosses to his oak table. "If I can find it under all this mess," he says, carefully picking through the shattered fragments of jars. "Ah, here it is."

He pulls an amethyst jewel from a bag.

"Take this gem, Summer. It's an amulet. It will pro-

tect you from Lumanor's hypnotic gaze. My magic will protect me, but you must be sure to wear this at all times."

You slip the golden chain of the amulet around your neck, dazzled by its sparkling beauty and touched by this mountain man's concern.

"Thank you, Folc. I'll never take this chain from around my neck," you promise, holding his gaze.

Then, remembering your quest, you reluctantly break the spell of the moment and look away, asking, "When are we leaving, Folc?"

"In the morning," Folc says quietly. And then, more briskly, "First thing. Here's a map I drew of Perched Castle." He hands you a huge sheet of parchment. "Why don't you study it for a while and then get some sleep? I'll clean up my magic ingredients and see what I have left to work with here."

Just then, Jarlath comes in the open door.

"You missed all the excitement," you say. The wolf crosses to you and settles beside you before the fire. You lean back and rest your head on his silvery fur, studying your map, until you find yourself drifting off into sleep.

Please turn to page 83.

You look at Edmond standing in the doorway, a grave look on his face. *I did promise Mother I'd come back alive,* you think. *And if I continue on this quest, after what I saw in that courtroom today, I'm really not sure I could keep that promise.*

You slowly unbelt Streak's golden sheath from your waist and hand it to Folc.

"Here," you murmur. "This magic sword is now yours. I hope you find a fighter who will wield it successfully against the Moon Dragon."

As Folc takes Streak into his hands, the blade glows with its familiar amber light, and you turn away, unable to look any longer at the blade you'd always dreamed of using.

"I will find a strong warrior to wield this sword," Folc tells you. "And together, he and I will go this very night to slay Lumanor."

As you walk out onto the moonlit trail with Edmond, your heart is heavy. You can only hope that Folc is successful in his quest and can save Stonekin Hollow before it's too late. The power is no longer yours, now that Streak is gone. You slip your arm through Edmond's, and wind down the walled path toward home.

THE END

Dawn comes quickly, peeping rosy sunbeams through Folc's window. You toss back the woolen blanket and sit up, already full of energy and anticipation.

Folc walks through the door, his dark curls shining with morning dew.

"It's a bright morning," he says, crossing to sit beside you. "A good day for us to slay a dragon, don't you think?"

You breathe in his scent of leather and herbs, and a warm rush surges through you. You feel your cheeks begin to flush and pretend it comes from concern about the dragon.

"Do you really think I can do it?" you ask.

"Summer," says Folc gently, taking your hands into his. "Ever since I saw you on that path, standing bold and bright, your sword drawn, your eyes determined, I knew that you had what it takes to slay the Moon Dragon. We'll do it, Summer. I know we'll do it."

He stands up and crosses to his oak table covered with magical ingredients. "Now, down to business."

You take a deep breath to try to clear the redness from your cheeks, the warm feeling from your veins. Pulling Streak from its sheath, you sit beside a sandstone block by the fire.

Folc opens a jar and takes out a bit of gum arabic. Then he lowers his eyelids and plucks out a lash.

"Ouch!" he says, wincing. "That smarts! Now, in a moment, we'll both be invisible." He wraps the eyelash in the sticky gum.

"This spell will get us into the castle, past the dragonfly guards. But as soon as we near the dragon, we will be visible again. As we attack Lumanor the spell will dissolve."

"And then what will we do?" you ask, scraping your blade across the sandstone.

"That's up to you, Summer. You have two excellent weapons—your sunbeams, which will weaken the beast's power, and your sword. Lumanor's vulnerable spot is at the base of his throat. There you will find a mark shaped like a crescent moon. If your sword enters that mark, you will fell the Moon Dragon."

Excitement pounds through your veins. You are so close now to completing your quest, you can almost feel the joy of your victory.

"I will do all I can with my magic to help you," says Folc, filling his pouches with strange herbs and dusts and stones. "But the ultimate blow is up to you."

Now you raise Streak to the window, and the sunlight glistens along the sharpened edge.

"Our time has come, Streak," you say. "May we fight our finest battle!" You slip your magical sword into its sheath and look up at Folc . . . but he isn't there! All you see is a soft glow near the oak table.

"Folc?" you call.

"I'm right here, Summer." You jump a foot when you hear his voice right next to you.

"I'm invisible," says Folc. "And now, so are you and Jarlath."

You look down at your hands and feet and see nothing but the stone floor.

"I've never been invisible before," you say, delighted. "Now that's an effective spell."

"Let's go," says Folc. "We want to get to the dragon during daylight, before the next moon rises."

Folc takes your hand, and the three of you make your way up the winding walled path. As you ascend, the

pink fog thickens until you can barely see the twists in the trail ahead.

You shield your eyes, and the dry, metallic odor of the mist fills your nostrils.

"Isn't this fog dangerous, Folc?" you ask.

"There's not enough poison left in it to hurt us," he says. "The deadly vapors in Lumanor's breath last for only a few minutes."

A hollow silence surrounds you as you approach the castle, muffling your voices, and an eerie coolness creeps beneath your garments, chilling your skin.

Then it stands before you, eclipsed by pink clouds.

"The castle of the Moon Dragon," whispers Folc. Through the fog, you can see huge sandstone blocks, half-disintegrated from the dragon's breath, and a great stone slab of a door with no window.

"Follow me," comes Folc's muffled voice. Still holding his hand, you creep behind him to a small door on the side of the castle. "This leads to a chamber the dragon seldom uses," he whispers. "We should be able to get from here to the treasure room with no problem and surprise him while he sleeps."

Soon you are entering a large chamber, thick with fog, and you shiver from the strange, empty coolness that permeates the air. Jarlath lets out a low growl.

"So you have come at last," bellows a cavernous voice from behind. You whirl around, whipping out Streak, to see a great dragon wing sweep before you, cutting through the haze, sending pink sparks flying to the far corners of the chamber. There, in clear sight, filling the far end of the room, stands the awesome Moon Dragon.

His eyes shimmer with pink threads. His body glis-

tens with cool blue scales, and his wings are transparent, luminous in the glow of the pink sparks.

"There," says Lumanor. "Now you will be visible to your friend who's been waiting for you."

As you notice your hand holding Streak come into view, a young man steps out from the haze, finely dressed in green velvet, cuffed and collared in lace.

"Edmond!" you cry. "The dragon has captured you!"

"No, Summer," says Edmond brightly. "I came here on my own. I didn't want to see you hurt in a needless battle. I thought we would first attempt to negotiate a contract. You know, a sort of truce."

"I can't believe it!" you cry.

"Well, believe it," says Edmond. "I think I'm making some headway." He nods toward Folc. "And who is this?"

"He's . . . a friend of mine," you say. You turn to Folc and whisper, "Edmond's been hypnotized, hasn't he?"

"I don't think so, Summer," he says. "His eyes don't glow with the pink light of entrancement."

Edmond comes to wrap his arm around your shoulder and pull you away from Folc.

"Don't worry, Summer," he says. "I'm not under the dragon's spell. Lumanor agreed to leave me alone until he could meet you. He wants a peaceful settlement."

The Moon Dragon's voice rumbles the walls, saying, "Your friend will be my spokesman."

"Now you get to see me in action," says Edmond, winking.

You and Folc exchange wary glances.

"These are the terms," states Edmond, strutting back over to the dragon. *He's actually enjoying this,*

you think, aghast. *He thinks this is all just a game!*

"If the Moon Dragon agrees to confine his kingdom to Tarsia, never threatening the Hollow again, then you, Summer," he says, pointing a finger for emphasis, "must agree to stay out of Tarsia and leave the beast alone."

Lumanor curls his tail forward and shoots a sidelong glance at Edmond. *Did I see a trace of amusement in his glimmering eyes?* you wonder.

"In addition, I promised to give the dragon a small collection of emeralds and rubies and a few pieces of gold jewelry thrown in for good measure."

"But my grandmother!" you cry. "I will agree to nothing unless I see Grandma Millicent set free!"

"In that case," bellows the beast, sweeping Edmond aside, "we must descend to my prison so that you may see her. And," he adds, turning his cold craters of eyes on you, "all weapons must be left in this room."

"But that's unfair!" you exclaim, gripping Streak's hilt. You turn to Folc, and he rolls his eyes as if he can't believe Edmond is serious.

"I can't imagine this beast agreeing to a peaceful settlement," he whispers. "If you lay down your sword, we are all powerless. And Lumanor knows that."

Edmond comes toward you and wraps a stray curl back over your ear, saying, "Don't listen to this magician, Summer. He just wants to show off his powers to impress you. The truth is, this dragon isn't as nasty a fellow as all the stories claim. He hasn't laid a claw on me!"

"Hasn't laid a claw on you!" cries Folc, his eyes blazing. "What about Summer's grandmother? What about my brother?" He leans toward Edmond, and

hisses through clenched teeth, "I can't listen to another word of this!"

Suddenly, POOF! an amber glow flashes from Folc's fingers, surrounding Edmond. And there on the floor sits a white rabbit, its blue eyes wide in amazement. It wriggles its pink nose and scurries off to the corner, trembling.

I may have been irritated with Edmond, you think, *but Folc had no right to go this far!* You turn to Folc, fuming. "That was drastic and cruel!" you exclaim. "How dare—"

But you stop in midsentence, for the dragon's eerie gaze has moved to the rabbit, and he slowly prowls toward the corner, his fangs dripping hungrily.

You dive for Edmond, tucking him under your arm. You can feel his little heart beating furiously inside his furry body. Lumanor glares down at you, his fangs glistening, faint puffs of pink mist escaping from his nostrils.

"Are we going to talk?" he bellows. "Or do I just destroy you all with a single blast of fog?"

I'm so furious about what Folc did to Edmond, I'd like to negotiate just to spite him! you think angrily. *But should I dare even try?* You stroke Edmond's furry head, backing away from the hungry dragon.

If you decide to attack with Streak, not trusting Lumanor, turn to page 55.

But if you decide to negotiate with Lumanor, turn to page 116.



It can't hurt just to talk to him, you think. *If I find I'm getting myself into trouble, I can just leave and move on to the Academy.*

"Your home isn't far from here?" you ask.

"No," he answers, pointing to Jarlath, who's already started down the trail. "Here, just follow us."

Soon you have made your way out onto the trail winding along the coast of the Tarsian Sea and are standing before a door bearing a wolf-head knocker.

"Go ahead in," says Folc. "Jarlath and I will collect some wood for the fire. We're almost out."

You enter the small cottage, and at once you are impressed with its simple and orderly yet cozy appearance. Shivering from the coolness that permeates the stone walls, you decide to get a fire started with the wood that's already there.

When you cross to the hearth, a sheet of parchment on a table nearby catches your eye. *It looks like a letter,* you think. *Perhaps I shouldn't read it.* But your curiosity gets the best of you.

Please turn to page 103.

You spin around and dash toward the woods before the dragonflies can stop you. Their angry humming drones in your ears, and they hover above you in the treetops. But, as you suspected, the forest is thick, and the insects cannot get through the tangled branches to capture you.

You speed through the woods, dodging for cover so that the dragonflies will lose sight of you, when CRASH! you run headlong into something on the path, and you spring back quickly, drawing Streak.

Terrified, you look up to see that you have collided with Folc.

"Oh, I'm so s-sorry!" you stammer, the combination of surprise and Folc's closeness taking your breath away. "I was running from a swarm of dragonflies, and I wasn't watching."

A look of concern darkens Folc's bearded face. "They were sent by the Moon Dragon," he says. "They are Lumanor's guards. You're lucky you escaped."

Now that you are calmer, you realize the droning has faded away. "Where would they have taken me?" you ask.

"Straight to the dragon, no doubt. Any stranger is considered a dissident," he says.

You sigh with relief, thankful that you hadn't listened to Edmond, after all. You want to meet the Moon Dragon on your terms, not the dragon's.

"And what happened to your friend Edmond?" asks Folc, as if he read your thoughts.

"He returned to the Hollow," you say. "I'll be heading on to the academy by myself now."

"If you're looking for a magician," says Folc, "per-

haps I can offer you help. I'm a magic-user myself."

Though startled, you show no reaction. *It seems too coincidental to have run into this man twice now,* you think, *and I still have no sign that I should trust him.*

"We can go to my home to talk," he says, "where we'll be safe from the dragon's agents. Then you can tell me about the magical help you're looking for."

You drop your eyes from his gaze. *There is something that draws me to this mysterious man,* you think. *A very strong attraction, stronger than I've ever felt for Edmond. I wonder if he's used his magic to weave a spell on me, to enchant me.*

"Would you like to talk?" asks Folc.

Prefering to continue on to the Magicians' Academy, you turn to page 121.

Deciding to go with Folc, you turn to page 90.

"Do you really think we have a chance against the dragon in the arena?" you ask.

"Yes, I do," says Folc, "if we work together."

"It would be a great triumph to slay the monster in front of all of Tarsia," you say, anticipating the victory. "The arena it is! Now, let's make a plan. . . ."

Moonrise comes quickly, the dragon stalking through the door. He tosses your magic sword at your feet.

"It's time to make a fool of yourself!" sneers the beast, lifting you up with a pearly claw.

"And as for this magician . . ." POOF! The tower fills with iridescent light, and suddenly your heart stops, for Folc stands immobile, a statue of marble.

"He will remain that way until I have won my victory, lowlander!" Lumanor hisses. His pink-threaded eyes turn to you, and you must look pale with shock, for he laughs loudly.

"You didn't think I'd let him help you with magic, did you? Fool! In fact, he can come along to watch. He'll stand by helplessly while I destroy you!"

Your heart pounds in your eardrums. *Without Folc,* you think numbly, *I am lost. All is hopeless.*

Terrified, you freeze as the dragon picks you up. He carries you and Folc down spiraling corridors and through long tunnels and, finally, out into the bright, moonlit arena. He sets Folc down in a corner and hurls you to the stony ground.

The jolt awakens you from your state of frozen terror. The blood begins to race through your veins, and you look around you. The noisy stands are a blur of colors—scarlet, blue, green and violet—all washed in a thin haze of pink. Cheers and jeers ring from the hyp-

notized crowd as the Moon Dragon struts arrogantly before it, his great wings outstretched.

Gifts rain down upon the beast from the throng. They're throwing jewels and fruits, silken robes and golden trinkets, chanting, "Our leader, our dragon!"

Suddenly a voice from the stands cuts through the clamor like a sunbeam: "Summer! Don't let them intimidate you! You can do it!"

It is Edmond, his bright face a consoling sight. *What's he doing here?* you wonder.

You slowly draw Streak from the golden case, and the smooth feel of its pearl handle is as familiar as Edmond's face. You breathe in long and calmly.

"This young lowlander dares to insult me with her meager magic sword and bold words," snarls Lumanor to the throng. "And she is nothing but a girl! A girl!" He howls with laughter, and the crowd joins in.

Suddenly you know exactly what to do. "There is only one way to conquer this dragon," you whisper to Streak. "Let's do it!"

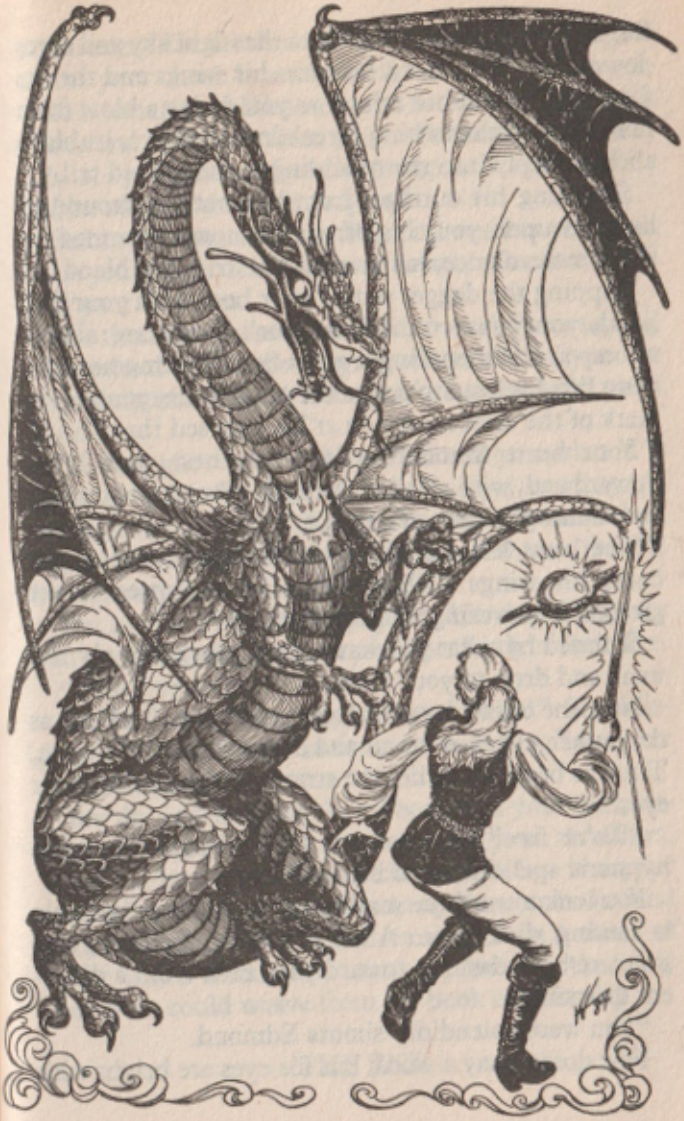
Rising to your feet, you circle the arena, Streak's glowing blade poised in front of you. The Moon Dragon's huge wings shimmer in the moonlight, his great luminous body towering before you. But you feel no fear now. You block out the noise of the crowd.

The dragon turns from the crowd and, with a sudden jerk, whips his tail forward, swiping across your legs so powerfully that your knees buckle under. You fall to the ground, the wind knocked from your lungs.

Lumanor bows deeply before his admirers.

"You see," the dragon sneers. "She is a mere girl, powerless before me!"

Using your arms for support, you stagger to your



feet as Lumanor soars high into the night sky and dives downward. With a cry, he raises his wings and thrusts forward to strike but misses as you dodge a blow from his wing and then swing Streak in a wide arc, its blade slicing deeply into the offending moon-globed tail.

Shrieking his outrage, Lumanor sweeps around to descend upon you, his arrogance now consumed by sheer malevolence, his severed tail dripping blood.

Slipping the dagger out of your boot with your free hand, you pause until Lumanor's fangs are almost upon you and then fling it at his face. The moment the beast lifts his head to dodge the small knife, you see the mark of the crescent moon at his exposed throat.

Your heart thundering in your chest, you lunge upward and, with all your strength, plunge your magic sword into the dragon's throat.

The beast lets out an anguished howl and staggers back, his wings flailing. Then he collapses to the ground, a quivering mound of scales.

Stunned by what you have done, you suddenly feel weak and drop to your knees.

Now the crowd is on its feet, gasping in disbelief, as the pink fog rises in the air and evaporates. One by one, Tarsians begin to smile, the strange glow leaving their eyes.

"We're free!" they shout. "The Moon Dragon's hypnotic spell has been broken!"

You look toward the marble statue and see that Folc is coming alive again. All of a sudden, Edmond and Folc are both dashing toward you, each from a different direction.

"You were splendid!" shouts Edmond.

Folc doesn't say a word, but his eyes are bright with

admiration. He reaches toward you, brushing fingers across your cheek in a silent tribute.

You turn then to Edmond, who has taken a step backwards and is looking from you to Folc and back again. *Oh, no!* you think. *Now I'm going to have to make a choice about Edmond's proposal.*

Before you say a word, Edmond reaches over and takes your hand. You hold your breath, reluctant to tell him your decision.

But then he moves your hand toward Folc, saying, "It seems that Summer slays hearts as skillfully as she slays dragons. And, obviously, it's not my heart she's after."

He pats your head lightly. "I'll tell you what. I'll make it easier for both of us," he says, heading off through the crowd. "I'll just be on my way now. And I'll see you both back in the Hollow. I'm sure there'll be a victory celebration for us all."

You turn to Folc, smiling up into his eyes. Suddenly you are lost again, in the crystalline depth of their fire.

"Folc," you say.

But he puts a finger to your lips. "Shhh!" He whispers. "You don't have to say anything. Just close your eyes, Summer."

You do, and he takes the ribbon from your hair, letting your curls tumble down around your shoulders. Then his hands touch your cheeks, his lips kiss your eyelids, gently, sweetly. You wrap your arms around him, and suddenly you feel enveloped in a cloud of magic more wonderful, more mysterious, than any spell Folc could weave from his book of wizardry.

THE END

Grandma Millicent's words ring through your head: "You must do what your heart tells you, Summer."

I cannot rely on others the rest of my life, you think. *I have fine abilities and a quick wit, and I'm going to conquer the dragon all by myself.*

Even in the chill of the mountain night, however, your palms begin to sweat with apprehension. You tread higher and higher along the walled path, feeling your way through the darkness.

I'm almost to the castle now, you think, *and daylight is still hours away. It would be foolish to try to attack now, when the dragon is most powerful. I'll wait until sunrise.*

You slip the knapsack off your back, using it for a pillow as you curl into a hollow in the stone wall, your eyes scanning the dark sky. *I have plenty of time to plan a strategy,* you think. *First I'll scout out the castle and find a way to sneak past the guards. . . .*

Just then the black silhouette of the Moon Dragon flashes across the moon. A sharp chill pierces your body. You watch, your heart trembling, as the monster swoops downward, his mighty wings outstretched, toward the castle . . . no, lower than the castle, down the mountainside, through the glistening mist . . . toward you!

His underbelly glows in the darkness. His huge eyes flicker, pink and white moon-globes against the night sky. The beast dives toward the wall behind you, and you jump to your feet, whipping Streak from your side. The mountain looms high on one side, the wall on the other, and you back up the trail, away from the monster, your mind racing.

The Moon Dragon perches on the wall, before

you, his pale eyes, threaded with shimmering pink, fixed on you.

"What do you want with me?" you demand, trying to hide your fear. Lumanor lets out a hollow laugh that seems to come from some empty, distant place.

"Every stranger who comes to Tarsia," he snarls, his lustering claws tapping against the wall, "every stranger decides to stay. And so, lowlander, shall you."

The beast does not pull his gaze from you for a moment, and though you avert your eyes, you have no way of discreetly reaching the sunbeams in your knapsack on the ground. *I'll turn as if to walk away,* you think, *and then quickly grab my sunbeams and toss them in the monster's face.*

As you turn to move, instantly your feet are frozen to the ground. You are unable to take a step.

Lumanor laughs eerily. "You're not going anywhere, are you?" he asks.

You look back toward the awesome, glowing creature and just then, he lunges at you, ripping the amulet from your neck with a glistening claw. He hurls the lammasu's gift to the ground and hovers close above you, his luminous eyes glaring.

Don't let him sense your fear, you tell yourself. You glance into the strange, moon-pale eyes, cold craters of eyes, and you feel the coolness drawing you in. You bend down and reach inside the knapsack now, but you are moving as if in slow motion, and your grip on the jar of sunbeams is weak. . . .

"Your eyes are beautiful" comes the hollow voice of the glimmering beast. "They are beginning to glow. . . ."

"No!" you cry, shaking your head wildly. You force your hand around the flowered jar, but your fingers are

slow, your grip loose. Your gaze is drawn back into the shimmering pink eyes.

I'm losing myself, you think dreamily. *I cannot lose myself . . . I cannot. . . .*"

Suddenly a great stone wall crashes down between you and the Moon Dragon, and a hand seizes yours, dragging you back up the path. But your feet are frozen from the beast's spell, and you fall, smashing your head against something hard. . . .

Your eyes open very slowly, as if waking from a long, dark sleep. The scent of herbs drifts into your consciousness, and firelight flickers across the heavy cloak that covers your body.

"I'd almost given up hope," says a voice from across the room.

You sit up slowly, your head pounding. "Oh, my head!" you moan, pressing your hands against your throbbing temples.

Folc comes toward you now, a worried look in his eyes. "You tried to do it alone, didn't you? Otherwise, you never would have been so close to Perched Castle," he says. "And you discovered the dragon's power is much stronger than yours."

You squint hard to concentrate, bringing back the memories of your encounter with the dragon. "I was just getting a grip on my sunbeams . . ." you say, remembering.

"You were just beginning to be hypnotized by the dragon," he corrects.

"Then it was you who dropped the magical stone wall in front of the monster?" you ask.

"Yes," he says. "And then I cast a Transport Spell to get us here quickly. If I hadn't, you'd probably be

waking up in Lumanor's crater prison instead of in my cottage."

His words make you defensive. *I didn't need to be rescued,* you think. *I'm not a helpless child. I know I could have gotten a grip on those sunbeams if he hadn't interrupted with his magic.*

Or could I? you wonder. *Perhaps the dragon's spell was beginning to conquer me. . . .*

Folc is watching you, and his eyes and voice are grave.

"Aren't you even a little grateful that I saved you?" he asks.

"Well," you say, "to tell you the truth . . .

"I am grateful. If it hadn't been for you, the dragon probably would have captured me."
Turn to page 127.

"I was doing very well on my own. If you hadn't interfered, I'm certain I would have won my battle against the dragon." *Turn to page 136.*

If I believe I have the strength to slay the Moon Dragon, you think, *then I can certainly handle a swarm of dragonflies, even if they are huge.*

"Make way for me to pass," you threaten the leader, "or you'll be sorry you ever came to find me."

The insect doesn't budge.

"If you don't move, I'll be forced to use my blade."

The dragonflies hiss and hum, moving in on you with their wriggling antennae and shining eyes. In a flash, you raise Streak above your head.

"Attack, Streak!" you cry. "Get us out of here!"

You sweep Streak's glowing blade from side to side in a well-practiced pattern, whipping off fragments of glimmering antennae. The insects drone angrily, moving closer and closer, but you charge through, striking one after the other with your sword.

Dragonflies collapse to the ground, moaning, and suddenly the leader flies above the swarm and darts down toward you before you can lift Streak in defense. In one motion you roll to the left, dodging its attack, and sink Streak into the soft scales at its neck.

With a cry, it crashes to the ground, its wings fluttering and shaking. The other dragonflies back away for a moment, watching in disbelief.

Instantly you leap over injured dragonfly bodies and charge up the path. Your heart pounding, you race faster and faster, far away from the shimmering insects, high up the walled pass. You throw a glance over your shoulder now and then, but it seems the dragonflies have not followed you. You slow your pace and look around, trying to get your bearings.

Please turn to page 21.

You cross to the table and take the note into your hands. It is frayed along the edges and looks worn, as if it's been read many times.

Dear Folc,

In spite of your warnings, I must do what I think best. I can no longer sit back and watch the dragon destroy our homeland. Jarlath and I are setting off for Perched Castle. I am well-armed, and even if I should fail, I will die a noble death, knowing that I have done my best to try to end the dragon's reign of terror.

May goodness always be with you,
Aralt

The note sends a shiver through to your heart. *Who is Aralt?* you wonder.

You turn away from the letter, rubbing your hands together to warm them. You build a fire in the hearth and settle beneath a blanket in a great, soft chair, your mind tangled with thoughts of Aralt's letter and the dragon and your own strength.

I know many men have tried to slay the dragon, you think. *And my dreams may be just that—dreams. Maybe I'm not capable of—*

Just then the door flings open and you jump, for in strides Folc, Jarlath at his side. His face brightens when he sees you, and he crosses to unload an armful of firewood before the hearth.

"So you're making yourself at home, I see?" he asks, smiling. His cheeks are ruddy, and the fresh clean

scent of the sea lies on the heavy wool of his cloak.

"Yes, I am. I hope you don't mind."

"Of course not," he says. "I'm glad you feel comfortable." He pulls off his cloak and tosses it on a chair by the oak table.

"Folc," you ask, shooting him a sidelong glance. "Who is Aralt?"

A grave look crosses his face and he crouches before the hearth, slowly stoking the fire. His face is thoughtful, intent in the glow. *He's very different from Edmond,* you think. *He doesn't take life lightly.*

"My brother," he says quietly. "Aralt was my older brother."

"Was?" you murmur, a tremor in your voice.

Folc reaches to pick up the letter, fingering it gently as if he's done it a thousand times.

"The dragon killed him over a year ago," he says. "I saw his note too late. When I went looking for him, I found his body lying in the woods near the castle."

"But Jarlath survived?" you ask, not knowing what else to say.

"Barely," says Folc. "Beneath his silver fur, you can see the scars left from the dragon's claws. It took months and much magic to heal him."

You bury your fingers deep into the fur on Jarlath's back and feel the welts on the surface of his skin. Your heart goes out to this brave animal.

"Jarlath was my brother's constant companion," says Folc. "Ever since Aralt's death, Jarlath has been with me as my guard, my scout—my best friend."

Moved by Folc's story, you say, "I'm sorry about your brother, Folc. It worries me to hear such tales. You see, I've always had a dream that I could conquer

the Moon Dragon. And now that I've come to Tarsia, I wonder . . ."

Folc is sitting on the rug by Jarlath, and his deep brown eyes meet yours. They don't dance with amusement, like Edmond's. They are concerned and earnest.

"What do you wonder?" he asks gently.

"I wonder if my fate won't be the same as Aralt's. I wonder if I have the power to accomplish my dream."

Folc runs a finger across his lips, and his gaze settles on Streak.

"I must admit, when I saw you carrying the magic sword," he says, "I was surprised. I suppose I expected to find a man carrying it, a knight perhaps or a fierce warrior."

Your eyes widen in amazement. "How do you know about my sword?" you ask.

"I've dreamed of it many times, Summer," he says. "It's the sword that will ultimately destroy the dragon. And in my dream, I am the magician that assists the fighter in battle."

"And you don't think I can do it, do you?" you cry, agitated both with Folc and your own lack of self-confidence. "You said you were surprised to see me carrying such a powerful sword!"

"You didn't let me finish," says Folc. "I may have been surprised at first, but—"

"It's not just brawn that makes a good fighter!" you interrupt, angry now that you feel Folc has put you on the defensive. "It takes wits and ability."

"I know that," says Folc quietly.

"And Streak and I have been through a lot together. Just because nobody ever killed this dragon before, doesn't mean that we can't!" you tell Folc.

"That's true," says Folc. "And I've no doubt that, with the right help, you'll succeed."

You look up at Folc, finally listening to what he's saying. "Do you mean it?" you ask. "You really believe that I can do it?"

"You're a fine swordswoman, you're determined, and you carry the only weapon capable of slaying the dragon. With some magical assistance to back you up, I'd say you have everything going for you."

Your confidence suddenly restored, you leap from the chair and cry, "So what are we waiting for?"

Folc laughs and crosses to the table, laying out a sheet of parchment. "Come here, Summer, and look at this sketch of Perched Castle. You can study it tonight so that you'll know every chamber, every stairwell, every guard post by the time we leave tomorrow."

"Tomorrow?" you repeat, thrilled to be making such quick progress.

"Right. I'll prepare my magical ingredients in the morning. Then we'll set out for the cave wolves that live in the Tarsian highlands. They know of a secret passage that leads directly into the dragon's treasure room. That's where he spends most of his time."

"How do you know so much about the dragon?" you ask.

"I've been preparing for this day ever since Aralt died," he says. "I've been inside the castle when the dragon is gone and have planned out an entire strategy. I'll tell you all about it in the morning."

You settle back under the blanket by the fire, the parchment in your hand. Soon your eyes close.

Please turn to page 15.

"I think it's best to take the dragon by surprise." you say. "It gives us an advantage we won't have in the arena."

"In that case, now is the best time to move," says Folc, leaping to his feet and crossing to the window. He looks down at the courtyard far below. "There are too many dragonfly guards out there for us to sneak out," he says.

"Then how do we get to the dragon?" you ask.

He ponders for a moment, stroking his beard and finally concluding, "Magic's the only way. With the ingredients I brought in my magic pouches I'll turn myself invisible and light as a feather. Then I'll slowly fall out the window, unnoticed, down to the courtyard. I'll check out the area, find out where the dragon is sleeping, and come back and get you."

"I'll be waiting for you," you say.

"Perfect," says Folc. He rubs the back of his hand along your cheek and smiles into your eyes. Then POOF! he's gone. Crossing to the window, you see no sign of the invisible magician other than the scattering of leaves as he lands gently on the ground.

The few minutes he's gone seem like hours, but soon you hear the door behind you open, and you see Streak and your jar of sunbeams floating in.

"I'm here," says Folc's voice, "and, as you can see, I found your weapons." He hands them to you, saying, "Just in case of trouble, I'm going to stay invisible until we get inside the treasure room, where the dragon is sleeping. Once inside, we must move swiftly. I'll cast as much light as I can, to blind the beast, and you go in for the blow."

"At the mark of the crescent moon," you say. "All

right, Folc." You draw in a deep breath. "I'm ready."

"Then we're off!"

The door opens, and you creep through the long, dark tunnels of the castle, winding down a stone staircase toward the treasure room. You feel strange following someone you can't see, but you're glad to have Folc's help.

As you approach, the door of the room opens, and you tiptoe past the sleeping guards and step inside.

The door closes behind you, and suddenly Folc appears, as a streak of lightning bolts from his fingertips, shooting through the outer wall. Sunlight streams in through the opening, and the dragon stirs, roaring his anger at being disturbed.

"Now!" shouts Folc. He mumbles the words of his Light Spell, and, all at once, the room explodes with blinding light.

"My eyes!" Lumanor screams. "What vile creatures dare to challenge the great Moon Dragon!"

Then, shading your eyes with one hand, you swing Streak with the other in a wide arc, crashing it down on the beast just as the poisonous pink fog comes pouring from Lumanor's flared nostrils.

Instantly you grab the jar of sunbeams from your pack and fling it into the face of the dragon. Lumanor shrieks with rage as the beams dissolve the deadly mist.

He lunges forward, swiping across the room with his wings, but you dive into a pile of gems for protection.

The beast howls wildly, throwing his head back, his wings guarding his eyes.

You jump to your feet and lunge toward the dragon, plunging your sword into the crescent moon mark at its throat. The beast lets out an unearthly shriek. It stag-

gers back against the wall of the treasure room, collapsing to the floor in a shimmering heap, dead.

You step back, not believing what you've done.

"Brilliant!" cries Folc. "You were brilliant!"

"I can't believe I've actually slain the Moon Dragon," you say quietly.

"Believe it, Summer," he says. "Here, come look outside." He takes your hand and leads you to the hole burned through the wall by his Lightning Spell.

The day is clear and bright, not a speck of pink dust in the air.

"We've got to get back to the Hollow and tell them, Folc!" you say suddenly. "Come on!"

"We?" asks Folc. "Did you say 'we'?"

"I certainly did. You don't think I'd go back without you, do you?"

"But what will Edmond say?"

"He'll say he's sure you did it, all alone. He'll never believe I was capable of slaying a dragon."

"No," says Folc. "I mean, about us?"

You pause for a moment, pondering.

"He won't be pleased. But then I never did accept his proposal." You look up at Folc, smiling.

"Can you imagine that when I first met you I thought you had cast a spell on me?"

He smiles. "That's funny. I believe that's what you've done to me, Summer. I'm enchanted." His dark eyes draw you in as he pulls you close. You bury your head in his chest, breathing in his warm spiciness.

"And I hope," he whispers, "I hope this is one spell that lasts forever."

THE END

I don't want to hurt Edmond, you think. *But I must tell him the truth. I can't marry Edmond if someone else is on my mind.*

"I know fighting this dragon is important to you . . ." Edmond is saying.

"It's not just that, Edmond," you cry, shaking your head. "Of course, I'm thinking about my quest. But there's something else . . . Something very unexpected has happened and I . . . I don't know how to tell you. . . ."

For once, the smile fades from Edmond's face, and he falls silent.

"It's true I need a magician like Widahl to help me, Edmond," you begin. "And I . . . well, here in Tarsia last night, I found a magician who is willing to help me. . . ."

"And?" he asks impatiently. "Get to the point, please."

"And I suppose you could say that he is a very special magician," you blurt out, your gaze turning to the cliffs again.

"What's that supposed to mean, Summer?" Edmond's voice betrays his irritation. He turns back to the wall, tapping your knife nervously against the palm of his hand. "Just what is a 'special' magician?"

"It's not that I don't care for you, Edmond," you say. "It's just that . . . I can't stop thinking about this magician. His eyes seem to follow me wherever—"

"So you're in love with someone else!" cries Edmond, slamming the handle of the dagger against the wall. "Is that it, Summer? Like a streak of lightning, in the course of just one evening, you are in love with someone else?"

"I wouldn't exactly call it love," you mumble.

"So he's the one who gave you the violets, isn't he?" Edmond snaps. "He gave you violets that sprang to life right before your eyes. How very romantic! I should have suspected!"

"Don't be angry, Edmond," you plead.

"How can I not be angry?" he cries, stalking back and forth along the wall. "You tell me you're in love with some magician you just met, and you expect me not to be angry? After a marriage proposal? After sixteen years? After I came all the way up here looking for you? That, Summer, is too much to ask!"

He shoves the handle of the knife into your hand.

"Well, I guess this is where we part, Summer. I'm sorry I ever came looking for you. I see now that you didn't want to be found!"

"Edmond," you plead. "Please understand—"

"I understand perfectly well, Summer. And I wish you luck in your quest." He turns to go. "I can't say I wish you luck in this magical little romance of yours, however!"

"I didn't want to hurt you, Edmond!" you cry.

"Too late for that, Summer," he calls over his shoulder. And with that, he rounds a turn in the twisted road and, you are alone, peering over the wall at the rugged cliffs of Tarsia. Slowly, tears begin to well in your eyes. You rest your elbows on the wall, and cover your face with your hands, the tears running down your wrists.

I didn't want to hurt him, you think. *I've never seen him so bitter. But I did what I knew inside was right. Edmond will survive, skimming along on the surface of life as always. I need more than that. I need to follow my heart.*

You reach into your pocket and pull out the violets

again. Just as before, they bloom at your touch, their purple petals sweet with the scent of early summer.



You move from the wall and make your way back up the rocky trail, through the dry leaves of the forest, toward the sea. Soon you are standing before Folc's carved door, staring at the wolf-head knocker. You take a deep breath.

Before you have time to plan what you're going to say, the door flings open, and Jarlath and Folc step out onto the path.

"Summer," Folc says surprised. You can see by the light in his eyes that he's pleased to see you. "We were just about to take a walk. Will you join us?"

"Well . . . yes," you answer. You walk beside him, feeling awkward and drained from the intense emotions you've gone through this morning.

"I like the violets," you say.

"What violets?" he asks, looking straight ahead.

You hold up the little bouquet, still clutched in your fist. "The ones I found next to my dagger, Folc."

He glances at the flowers and says, "Oh, those violets," as if he's embarrassed.

"Didn't you give them to me, Folc?" you ask.

He shoots a sidelong glance at you, as if he's trying to read your reaction. You smile, and gradually his eyes brighten, and he smiles back.

"Yes," he murmurs. "I gave them to you."

"They're beautiful, Folc," you tell him.

"So are you."

He continues down the path, Jarlath at his side, but you stop. Folc turns back, puzzled.

"Aren't you coming with us?" he asks.

"I have something to tell you, Folc," you say. "I don't know exactly how to put this, but . . ."

He frowns, a look of concern clouding his eyes.

"Folc," you begin, "people have been telling me since I was little that my place is next to a man. That I should get married, forget about my dreams of dragonslaying, act the way they think a girl should act.

"So I set out alone to prove to myself that I can accomplish my goals, make the world a better place. And the way I can do that is by ridding Stonekin Hollow of the threat of the Moon Dragon."

"And I think that's marvelous, Summer," says Folc. "I admire your determination."

"But," you continue, knowing you must say what's on your mind, "now I find that I'm . . . well, there's something about you, Folc . . . your intensity, your gentleness, the flowers . . ."

You set your shoulders and drop the violets out of

your line of vision. "I can't let my feelings for you interfere with my quest. If you're going to help me fight the dragon, we must keep our heads clear and our hearts on our mission."

A glimmer of understanding flickers across Folc's face. "So that's why you left last night," he says. "I was very disappointed, Summer. I'm glad you've explained to me your reason for leaving."

He strokes his beard for a moment, pondering. Then his gaze meets yours, and it is piercing.

"Summer, I want you to know something. Ever since Lumanor seized Perched Castle, I've wanted to destroy him. But," he says, his voice grave, "two years ago, my brother Aralt took it upon himself to challenge the dragon. He and Jarlath set out together. A few days later, only Jarlath returned, torn apart by the dragon's claws. My brother never came back."

"Oh, Folc," you say. "I'm so sorry."

"Yesterday," he continues, "for the very first time, I realized there was actually a possibility of ending the dragon's terror and destruction. With our combined strengths, we have the power to do what no one has yet been able to do.

"I understand what you've told me, and I agree. Nothing, Summer, should be allowed to stand in our way. Not even thoughts of romance," he says then, his glance catching yours. "As hard as that may be. . . ."

Folc extends his hand, his bearded face serious.

"Then we shall be comrades in battle from this point on," he says firmly.

You shake hands in agreement. "Comrades it is!" And only for an instant do you feel a twinge of disappointment. You gently slip the violets into your pocket.

"Now, we have no time for a walk," says Folc. "Let's get to work."

Back at the cottage, Folc leads you to the oak table where he shows you a parchment sheet.

"I've sketched out a map of Perched Castle," he says. "Every guard post, every chamber. Here's the dragon's treasure room."

You examine the parchment, trying to imprint it exactly on your memory.

"Now, we want to avoid the dragonfly guards at all costs," Folc says. "So I suggest we pay a visit to the cave wolves on the other side of the mountain."

"Wolves?" you ask, nervously.

"They're good wolves," he explains. "Friends of Jarlath. They know of a secret passage that leads from their lair directly into the dragon's treasure room."

"So we can make it a surprise attack!" you say.

"While you study the map," says Folc, "I'll prepare my magic potions. We'll need them to distract the dragon so you can go in for your final blow unnoticed."

By evening, you have sharpened Streak to a thin edge, and Folc has filled his pouches with magical ingredients.

When Folc announces, "Time to go," you slip Streak into its sheath and head out the door, shivering with excitement as you wind up the path toward the wolves' lair, Jarlath leading the way.

Please turn to page 65.

You stroke Edmond's furry back and shoot an angry glance at Folc. "I'm willing to discuss a peaceful settlement," you tell the dragon. "But I prefer to do it in this chamber."

That way, you think, *Streak will be in the same room, should I need to reach for it.*

"Then lay down your sword!" bellows Lumanor.

You set Streak on the stone floor between you and the dragon, and then shoot a sidelong glance at Folc. His eyes are ablaze with anger at your decision.

"And I want Edmond back this minute to help negotiate!" you demand.

But suddenly you hear Jarlath growl, and you turn just in time to see the dragon lunge toward Streak, clamping his glimmering claws over the blade. "Silence, beast!" he bellows at the wolf.

Then Lumanor leans toward you, his eyes bright with a triumphant gleam. "Now, hand over your sunbeams!"

Seeing your confusion, he bellows, "Did you think that I, Lumanor, would not detect the magic in your knapsack? Give them to me!"

"No! I agreed only to lay down my sword."

"But don't you want to see your grandmother?" he hisses, and your eyes shoot wide open.

"Yes, of course," you quickly agree, "but—"

"Then here are my terms," snarls Lumanor. "If you agree to hand over all your weapons and go home, never returning to threaten me again, then I will stay out of Stonekin Hollow. And," he adds, with a grandiose sweep of his wing, "I will send your grandmother home with you."

Send Grandma Millicent home again! The excite-

ment pounds through your veins. *I think these negotiations are going quite well,* you think. *That is, if I can really trust this beast.* You look over to see Folc shaking his head in dismay.

"How do I know you're telling the truth?" you ask the dragon boldly. "How do I know my grandmother's even alive?"

Lumanor throws back his head arrogantly, letting out an angry hiss. "My word is as good as gold!" he snorts. He sees your eyes narrow in doubt. "All right, I'll let you talk to your grandmother, then. Listen to what she has to say."

Suddenly a sweet, strong familiar voice echoes through the chamber: "I'm here, Summer," it calls. "Please, dear, do whatever you must, so that we can be together again."

"Grandma Millicent!" you cry, your eyes searching the far corners of the room for a glimpse of her silver hair, her twinkling eyes. "Where are you?"

"I'm in the dragon's prison, Summer!" she calls, her voice bouncing off the stone walls. "Only you can free me! Do whatever he tells you. Please!"

"No!" cries Folc. "This is a trick!"

You stroke Edmond's soft fur. "Like your rabbit trick, Folc?" you ask crossly.

"That's Lumanor's voice, Summer," he insists. "It's a magical trick—ventriloquism."

"I know my own grandmother's voice!" you protest. "I'm sure it's her." *At least, I'm nearly sure it's her voice,* you think.

"Then do as I command!" bellows Lumanor. "That is, if you want to see her again!"

"So you want my sunbeams," you say, repeating the

terms of negotiation, "and a promise never to return to Tarsia again?"

"Exactly," snarls Lumanor. "And then you will get down on your knees in front of these witnesses," he adds, his bright eyes glaring first at Folc, then at the rabbit. "And you will pay homage to me."

"Pay homage!" you cry, the very thought making you bristle. "Never!"

Lumanor snorts, pale pink fog puffing from his nostrils.

"Then you will never see your grandmother again, foolish lowlander. You will be sending her to her death! And your precious Hollow will soon be mine!"

Your mind churns in a panic. *How humiliating to lower myself to my knees in front of this evil creature! It is a betrayal of all my beliefs. And what would Folc think of me?*

Yet, if I don't obey the dragon, Grandma Millicent and Stonekin Hollow may both be gone forever—

"Please, Summer!" comes your grandmother's voice, echoing through the chamber. "Release me from the dragon's bondage!"

What are you going to do?

If you do as the dragon says, hoping to free your grandmother and the Hollow, turn to page 27.

But if you decide that this is a trick and try to attack Lumanor with your sunbeams, turn to page 150.

If anyone can use Streak to slay the dragon, you think, *I can. And I'm not giving up just because Edmond has no confidence in my abilities.*

You suddenly feel that Edmond is in another world, a world of your past, and that more important futures are unfolding here in this fire-lit room, filled with the scent of herbs and the glow of magic. You look into Edmond's eyes, certain of your answer.

"If anyone is capable of slaying Lumanor, I am," you say quietly. "I'm not coming with you, Edmond."

Edmond looks at you a long moment, shrugs, and then ducks out the door. You are silent for a time, feeling sad to see him leave, yet certain that you have made the right decision.

"And now, Folc," you say, feeling slightly uncomfortable at being alone with this crystal-eyed magician. "Tell me more about your dream."

Folc settles in front of the hearth, gazing into the fire. "I began to have the dream after my brother Aralt died," he says quietly. "That was over a year ago."

"What happened to him?" you ask. "How did he die?"

"He was a fighter. One day he and Jarlath set out to slay the Moon Dragon, and only Jarlath returned. I found Aralt's body a few days later in the woods."

"Oh, Folc," you say, shuddering. "I'm sorry."

Folc reaches over to stroke Jarlath's silver fur. "Ever since then, Jarlath has stayed with me, as my guard, my scout—my best friend. And," he adds, shooting a piercing look at you, "ever since then I've been waiting for the fighter with the magic sword of my dream to come along."

"How much do you know about Lumanor?" you ask.

"Plenty," he says. "I've been through every tunnel and chamber of Perched Castle when the dragon's left his lair. I know where he sleeps—in his treasure room—and how he enchants people—with his eyes. And I've seen him breathe his deadly fog, killing those who refused to be hypnotized."

"By your account, you seem ready to challenge the monster," you comment, all distrust of this resolute man gone.

"I am," says Folc solemnly. "Are you?"

You nod. Now you're very glad you decided to stay, not to give up on your quest. Folc seems to be just the magician you need to succeed. You smile at him, and he smiles back.

"All right, then," he says, his eyes bright with determination. "Here's the plan. Tomorrow, we'll go to see the cave wolves who live in the highlands. They know of a secret tunnel that leads to Lumanor's treasure room. We'll take the beast by surprise."

When you settle before the fire to sleep that night, your heart races in anticipation, and your dreams are filled with visions of the Moon Dragon's eyes, veiled in deadly pink fog.

Please turn to page 15.

These sudden and intense feelings frighten me, you think. You pull your gaze away from Folc's glowing brown eyes. *Even if this isn't a magic spell but a romantic attraction I feel toward him, I must leave. I cannot risk being distracted from my quest by this mysterious bearded magician.*

"Thank you for your invitation," you tell him. "But I'd best hold to my plan. I'll continue on to the Academy of Magic."

"If that is your wish," Folc says quietly. You detect a twinge of disappointment in his voice.

"Follow this path a quarter mile," he says, pointing to a wooded trail. "On your left you'll find a sign announcing the Academy."

He motions to Jarlath, but before they start back into the forest, he turns to you. "If you should need help, my home is on the cliff overlooking the Tarsian Sea. I wish you a good journey, Summer."

"Thank you," you say. "And good-bye."

As you wind your way through the forest, you carry the glow of Folc's eyes with you. *I must put him out of my mind,* you think, *and concentrate on my journey.*

But it is not easy. For with each step, you feel drawn to return, to learn more about this intense man with the piercing gaze.

Strange croakings and cawings pierce the darkness as you travel along the wooded path. Above the branches, the moon hangs heavy in the sky, a golden August moon. If the breeze seemed charged with excitement earlier, it now blows steadily, dangerously, carrying an eeriness with it.

"I'm not afraid," you tell yourself, shivering in spite of your words.

Suddenly you jump, hearing a muffled creaking in the darkness. You whip out Streak and whirl around, peering into the forest. Your eyes meet a wooden sign that creaks in the wind on its rusty chains. In the glow of the moonlight you read, "Academy of Magic."

"Whew!" you cry aloud. "I've found it."

There is a bumpy stone path behind the sign that leads you to a massive building made of sandstone blocks and carved into the mountain. Its door is fashioned of iron, nailed shut with old timber.

"DON'T KNOCK!" announces a sign on the door.

You let out a sigh and complain, "Then how am I supposed to get in?"

"Just walk through," echoes a craggy voice from within.

You are so startled by the voice that a moment passes before you realize what it told you to do.

"Walk . . . right through the door? Why, that's ridiculous!" you snap.

"Only a ridiculous person would find it ridiculous," croaks the voice.

Challenged by the insult, you lift up your foot, stepping right through the door. Next goes your sword, then the rest of you, and to your surprise, you have, indeed, walked right through the door.

"Just as I suspected," echoes the voice. "A foreigner, carrying a weapon, no less. Put away your sword unless you want it turned into a walking stick."

You quickly slip Streak into the sheath and squint into the dim, firelit chamber.

You can make out shelves, stacked to the ceiling with books, and tables cluttered with bottles and flasks. Your eyes continue around the room until they rest on a

dinosaur, a miniature tyrannosaurus, stirring a cauldron over the hearth.

"Welcome to the Academy of Magic," croaks the beast. "Would you like a bite of lizard stew?"

You're too surprised to answer.



"The cat got your tongue, missy? What, aren't you accustomed to chatting with dinosaurs? All right, perhaps this will make you a little more comfortable."

With a POOF! a wizened little man replaces the dinosaur, white puffs of hair sprouting from the sides of his balding head. His bulbous nose sniffs the pot.

"If you don't want any stew, girl," he snaps, "then just what is it you came for?"

"I came to find a magician," you say. "Someone familiar with the powers of the Moon Dragon. You see, I intend to slay the evil beast."

The minute the words spill from your mouth, you

regret your directness. *It's very possible that this man is loyal to the dragon,* you think nervously.

"What I mean is . . ." you begin, but it's too late.

The wrinkled man glares at you, the bushy brows above his black eyes twitching. Then suddenly his mouth turns up into a crinkled grin and he chuckles pleasantly. He tries to talk, but the chuckles keep interrupting his words, and soon he throws back his head, laughing uncontrollably.

"Excuse me, sir," you say. "What is it I said?"

But the man is lost in laughter, tiny tears rolling down his puckered cheeks. He gasps for air between howls and then collapses to the floor, wooden spoon in hand, rolling about with glee.

"Oh, that really is funny!" he howls. "Oh, that tickles me! I needed a good laugh! Whew!"

He pulls himself together, brushing the rumples from his garments, and stands up to attend to his pot. "Now, really, why is it you came here, girl?"

Setting your jaw, you repeat, "I'm looking for a magician to help me slay the Moon Dragon."

The little man leans on a chair for support and begins to chuckle again, his body shaking with giggles.

"But you're . . ." He gasps between laughs. "You're nothing but . . . a . . . girl! A little girl from the lowlands, no doubt!" He pulls a handkerchief from his sleeve and wipes the corners of his eyes.

You feel your face grow hot with rage. *How humiliating! How infuriating!* you fume. *And to think I came here looking for help. Academy of Magic, indeed! I'd be better off alone . . . or with Folc, perhaps.*

"I can see I have come to the wrong place, sir," you

choke. "You're merely a silly magician who will be of no help to me, and I will waste not another minute of your time or mine. Good day!"

"How dare you!" he hollers, his voice cracking. "How dare you call me silly! And you," he sputters, "you, young lowlander, are going nowhere at all! That door is locked!"

You spin around to see great chains fasten themselves across the iron door. You rush forward, trying to walk through the way you entered, but your foot slams hard against solid iron.

Now you turn back to see the magician's body ablaze with red light. Suddenly the little man is gone, and there, towering over you, stands a great yellow ogre, its face bumpy with purple warts, its fierce black eyes glaring.

"You are a snip!" croaks the ogre in the same voice as the magician, "and not only that, but the powers of the dragon are not for man or beast to challenge!" It leans its warty face close to yours. "And certainly not," it spits, "for little girls!"

Now you are seething with anger, but gripped with fear at the same time. "I . . . I really meant no harm," you say, the fear winning out.

The ogre narrows its beady eyes. "I don't like your impudent ways, girl," it growls. "I suggest you apologize for your behavior before I do something rash!"

Just then, the lizard stew boils over, hissing and spitting great green froths into the fire. The ogre dives for the cauldron, and you realize this is your chance to escape.

You quickly look for an exit. There is a window behind you just large enough to squeeze through, and

you creep back toward it, keeping your eyes pinned on the ogre. The beast is griping and groaning over the frothing pot, and you hoist yourself up on the sill with both elbows, and squirm out the opening.

Into the night air you plunge, landing like a cat on your feet. You sail through the forest until you are a safe distance from the Academy. Stopping to catch your breath, you hear the clip-clop of horses' hooves approach down the walled path. You dart behind a tree, out of sight, and draw Streak.

"Don't be frightened!" calls a deep voice. "Come out from behind that tree!"

You peek out and see that a stately white horse has come to a halt a short distance away. Mounted on the horse is a knight, his fair locks bleached in the moonlight. His tall frame is clad in a suit of armor, its ornate finish buffed to a shining gleam.

He looks well-bred and elegant, you think. *But for all I know, it could be the magician from the Academy trying to trick me. I could make a run for it, through the forest. His steed would never catch me through the gnarled underbrush.*

"I am Sir Euston, Knight of Argent," he calls. "Won't you come out?"

If you decide to run away through the forest, turn to page 34.

If you want to talk to Sir Euston, turn to page 47.

"I kept trying to grasp hold of my sunbeams," you continue, the recollection of the nightmarish encounter now growing more vivid. "But I felt weak, too weak to fight, falling into a dreamy state."

"That's how the dragon snares all his prisoners. If they are very strong and refuse to be hypnotized, he'll attack with his fog. Death, in most cases, is instant."

You draw the woolen cloak tight around your neck and stare into the fire. There is a void in the pit of your stomach that you've felt before. It is the gnawing emptiness of disappointment. Of failure.

Folc did have to save me, after all, you think. *What could be worse than having to be rescued?*

"Sometimes," you say, gazing blankly at the leaping flames, "I wonder if I'm just fooling myself. I wonder if everyone else is right. That I really am nothing more than an ordinary girl with silly dreams of grandeur."

Folc sighs softly. "It's not easy, is it, Summer?" he says.

"I'm not asking for 'easy', " you say. "It's just that all my life I've believed in my dream, no matter what anyone else said. Now I've failed, Folc. I've tried and failed. I don't know if I can ever believe in myself again."

"This is probably the hardest part of being different," says Folc. "If you acted like everyone else in the world, you'd never have to stand alone. Lots of people would give you support. But you've decided to strike out on your own, to attempt a quest others only dream of. You must keep believing in yourself, Summer, even if no one else does. You can't give up."

You bury your head in your hands, feeling tired and beaten, your temples still throbbing.

"I don't know if I can, Folc," you whisper, tears burning your eyes. "I'm such a failure."

Folc crosses to the fire and sits beside you, wrapping his arm gently around your shoulder. "Come close, Summer," he says. "Just take a deep breath and rest next to me."

You lay your head against his shoulder, his warmth comforting you.

"Sometimes when the burden gets too heavy, we have to set it down for a while," he says. "We have to take time to renew our faith in ourselves before we can pick up and go on."

You close your eyes for a moment, wanting to rest, wanting to listen to Folc's calm voice, to breathe in the smell of his leather vest, the warm spiciness of his skin.

"I remember," he continues, his voice deep and quiet. "I remember once when I was studying to become a magician. I was in Dromigall, among great and wonderful wizards who could change mice into rabbits, snatch rainbows from the sky and tie them into knots. I wanted so badly to be like them."

"Did they give you encouragement?" you ask.

"No," he answers. "They felt that if you couldn't believe in yourself, from within, then you'd never have the stamina to be a magician. I wanted to prove myself to them, and I attempted a spell on my own. A spell in which you take a star from the heavens and capture it in a jar for everlasting light."

He sighs, the heaviness of the memory rushing back.

"Well, the star fell from the sky, just as it should have. But it landed in a valley and started a fire, a terrible fire that burned many trees and took two great wizards to extinguish."

"No," you say. "How terrible you must have felt."

His voice is grave and flat. "I gave up my studies, thinking I was a failure. I came back here, stripped of all confidence, believing that I would never have the courage to go on."

"And what happened, Folc? You went back to school, didn't you?"

"After a long time," he says. "Six months. During that time I learned that when your struggles become too difficult to handle, that when you lose your belief in yourself, you must wait. The strength will come back if you let it."

You are beginning to drift off to sleep. Folc stretches you out before the fire and covers you, tucking his cloak up around your chin.

"Rest now, Summer," he whispers. "Your heart will tell you when you are ready to pick up and go on."

You feel his lips touch your forehead, and they are soft and warm. You let out a sigh, feeling the glow and comfort of his kiss drawing you into sleep, a sleep of no worries, of clear darkness. The sleep you knew as a child, when you felt as if no harm could come to you.

Please turn to page 83.

If he's going to help me fight the dragon, I must be honest with him from the start, you think. You shoot a sidelong glance at the doorway and then look directly at Folc.

"I need to work with a magician who is as devoted to this quest as I am," you begin. "A magician who will support me to the end and not be led off track . . . for whatever reason."

"And?" asks Folc, his dark brows furrowed.

"And I think you should know that when I have slayed the dragon, I will probably—very probably—return to Stonekin Hollow to marry a merchant named Edmond."

"So," ponders Folc, stroking his finger across his lips, "so we are experiencing the same feeling."

You close your eyes, trying to decide where to take the conversation from here. *I know how to wield a sword so it whizzes and sings through the air,* you think, *but I don't know how to talk about such personal feelings, especially when they are so new.*

"You're blushing, Summer," says Folc gently.

"I never blush!" you cry, your hand flying to your burning cheek.

As Folc moves toward you, his scent is spicy and warm, like his herbs. He takes the hand from your cheek and holds it for a moment.

My honesty has backfired, you think, trembling inside both from fear and from Folc's touch.

Then you look directly into Folc's crystal brown eyes and, taking a deep breath, slowly pull your hand from his.

"I came here to work out a plan to end the tyranny of the Moon Dragon," you say quietly. "And if our feel-

ings are going to obstruct my quest, then I must find another magician to help me."

Folc turns from you and strides over to the oak table.

"Down to business, then," he says, lighting the candle before him. He pulls out a great sheet of parchment and a quill pen.

You stay in the doorway, bewildered by the suddenness of his reaction.

As you watch him sketching a map on the parchment, his curls shining in the candlelight, disappointment and relief flood your heart at the same time.

I got what I wanted, you think. *But he could have been a little more difficult to convince. I guess he wasn't feeling as strongly about me as I was feeling about him.*

He looks up from the parchment, stroking his beard with the end of the pen.

"Summer," he says, "I admire your determination. Believe me, I am as committed to this quest as you are. Here, I have something to show you."

He reaches into the drawer of the table and pulls out a small piece of blue cloth, frayed at the edges and stained with blood. He holds it up to the candlelight as if to see it more clearly.

"What's that?" you ask.

"It's a piece from my brother Aralt's shirt," he says, his tone grave, "the shirt he was wearing when the Moon Dragon killed him."

A cold shudder runs through your body. "No," you murmur.

"He and Jarlath set out to slay the dragon last spring. Jarlath barely escaped. Aralt didn't. I found his body in the woods a few days later."

"I'm so sorry, Folc," you tell him. You don't know what else to say, and there is a long silence between you. Folc folds the blue cloth back into the drawer.

"Now that you know why I am committed, why I want to destroy Lumanor," says Folc then, "tell me about yourself. What makes you so determined, Summer?"

"My grandmother, I suppose," you say. "She was a woman of commitment. And though she had no fighting abilities, she spent a great deal of time in Tarsia, trying to convince people to rise up against the dragon before it was too late. I've always been determined to finish the work she began."

"Something happened to her before she saw any success?"

"Yes, she disappeared. She went out to her garden one autumn day, and we never saw her again. And though we searched and searched, we found no sign of her or of what happened."

Folc's gaze grows intense. "Do you think the Moon Dragon carried her away?" he asks.

You look at Folc through tear-filled eyes and nod your head, horrified at the thought.

"Summer," he says, "I remember hearing about a woman who was abducted by a band of Tarsian elves and carried to the dragon as a gift. The finest offering a Tarsian can make is the sacrifice of a dissident."

"My grandmother was certainly a dissident," you murmur. "How long ago did you hear of this woman?"

"Oh, I guess about two years ago," Folc says.

"Yes!" you cry, leaping to your feet. "Yes, Folc! It could have been her!" You pace the stone floor excitedly. "What would the dragon have done with her?"

"Hypnotized her, probably," says Folc. "Or, if she refused to be enchanted, he could have thrown her into his crater prison . . . or killed her."

"We have not a moment to waste!" you cry. "If she's still alive, we must free her, Folc. We must slay the dragon and free my grandmother!"

Just then you hear a scratching noise at the door.

"That must be Jarlath," Folc says. You study the map on the table, while Folc crosses to the door.

You hear a shuffling of feet in the doorway and spin around to see Folc standing there, a horrified look in his eyes.

"Summer!" cries Folc's voice, but it is coming from the other side of the room, and when you turn, there, leaning against the hearth, is another Folc.

"What's going on? There are two of you!" you cry. "Is this some sort of magic spell?"

"Kill him, Summer!" shouts the Folc in the doorway. "That's not me, but a monster, a doppleganger, sent by the dragon to kill us! You must draw your sword and slay him at once!"

"No, Summer!" cries the Folc by the hearth. "That intruder is the doppleganger that has formed itself to look exactly like me! This is a vile trick!"

A doppleganger! you think, the blood racing through your veins. *A doppleganger will attack its likeness swiftly, killing Folc in a matter of seconds, if I don't stop it!* You whip out Streak and back up against the oak table, shaking.

"Yes, Summer, this *is* a trick!" agrees the Folc in the doorway. "The monster over there wants to see me dead because I am a dissident. Kill him, Summer! Kill him before he kills us!"



Your head whips from one Folc to the other, thinking, *They look the same, they speak with the same voice, their eyes glow with the same mystery.*

I have to act now, instantly, you think, *before Folc is killed! But how do I know which one is the real Folc?*

"Please, Summer, you must believe me," pleads the Folc by the hearth. "I'm really a good magician. I will really help you slay the Moon Dragon!"

Suddenly the Folc by the door flies across the room, grasping you by the arm. "You have no choice, then, Summer!" he cries. "You can't let the monster live. So you must kill us both!"

You tear away from his grasp as the other Folc now leaves the hearth and moves toward you both, slowly. *I think this is the monster moving in on me,* you say to yourself. *But how can I be sure?*

Your heart pounds in your temples, your ears, your chest. You must react now. What will you do?

Should you wait for a moment until you are certain who is really Folc? Turn to page 20.

Or will you attack the Folc who is moving toward you from the hearth? Turn to page 80.

Folc's eyes widen, as if he can't believe what you just said.

I don't want him to think I'm a helpless girl, needing to be rescued, you think. You continue with your train of thought.

"I was reaching for my sunbeams," you say, recalling the scene. "They're very powerful, and if I'd thrown them in Lumanor's face, he would have been blinded long enough for me attack with my blade. Folc, I would have killed that dragon, if you had just given me one more minute."

Folc's voice is quiet. "I'm sorry," he says. "I didn't realize you had the battle under control. Had I known, I never would have interfered."

Now feelings of doubt begin to creep into your heart. *Was I really in control?* you wonder. But your stubbornness gets the best of you.

Of course, I was! And I won't let this magician think I wasn't.

"I'm going back to try again!" you say, rising slowly to keep your head from throbbing more. "And I'm doing it by myself!"

Folc crosses his arms and gazes at you for a moment. "Well then," he says finally, "the least I can do is transport you back to where I found you. Just let me get my wish ring."

Folc holds your hand and places the silver ring on his finger. He mumbles some magical words until the ring begins to glow, and you are both wrapped in a soft green light.

Then suddenly POOF! you are lying on the soft coverlet of your bed in Stonekin Hollow, Folc standing beside you.

"I can't send you back to Lumanor," he says. "I care too much about you to allow you to walk into certain death, Summer. But if you ever decide you can use magical assistance to help you battle the dragon, you know where to find me."

You spring from the bed, your eyes burning with fury. "How dare you bring me back here!" you spit. "How dare you!"

But Folc is already fading into the green glow that surrounds him. "Good-bye, Summer," he says. And then, in a flash, he is gone.

You stalk from your bed to the window overlooking Tarsia.

"Why I never!" you fume. "That magician has no idea how powerful my weapons really are!"

But mingled with your outrage is an uncomfortable feeling that he may have done the right thing. For many years, no one has conquered Lumanor. And most who have tried have been ripped to shreds. *It may have been a mistake to think I could succeed single-handedly,* you reason.

Suddenly Lady Mertice rushes into your room, tears of joy pouring down her rouged cheeks. "Oh, Summer!" she wails, throwing her arms around you. "You've come home!"

You hug her tightly, resting your head on her shoulder. "But only for a little while, mother," you whisper. "I came home to reassure you that I will not attempt to battle Lumanor alone. I have found others who are committed and powerful, and I'll be leaving again this evening to get the help I need to slay the dragon."

Go back to the beginning and try again.

You glance around the clearing at this band of elves that just tried to enchant you. *I'm just not sure they can be trusted,* you think.

"I think we should make a run for it, Folc," you say. "If we hurry, we can get to the lair before the dragon comes."

Dorbin shakes his head as you dash from the clearing toward the walled path. But before you are out of the woods, you hear a great flapping of wings, and a tremendous blast of wind sweeps through the trees, veiling your vision in fog.

"Stop them!" bellows a thunderous voice.

Suddenly the elves appear again, surrounding you on all sides. They are armed with bows and arrows now, and their eyes glow with a pink light. Dorbin steps forward, his hood thrown back, his eyes gleaming.

"The dragon's hypnotized him again!" cries Folc. "And I haven't the power to free him, not with the dragon here! I can't fight the beast's magic directly."

The elves grab you both by the arms and drag you back to the clearing. Next to the fire stands the glimmering Moon Dragon, roaring his victory.

"We haven't got a chance against the dragon now," says Folc, "not with all these elves—"

Just then, Lumanor throws back his head, exhaling a huge cloud of poisonous pink fog toward you and Folc. You close your eyes and bury your face in your hands, realizing that you have both come to

THE END

"Mother," you say, as gently as possible. "I must use the abilities I have to stop the evil dragon. I will never be happy, married or not, until I try."

"Somehow I always knew it would come to this," she sniffs, blinking back her tears. "But you'll take Edmond along, won't you? Please, Summer."

You shoot a glance at Edmond, and he stands up, brushing the wrinkles off his trousers, a mischievous smile brightening his aristocratic features. *Well, he may not be of much help,* you think, *but it's a fair compromise if it will make my mother feel better.*

"Will you join me, Edmond?" you ask.

"Well . . ." He frowns, stroking his chin. "I don't know that I can get away from my work. . . ."

"Please, Edmond," begs Lady Mertice. "You can't let her go alone!"

You see the playful smile gradually return to Edmond's face. *I hope I'm not making a mistake,* you think. *His humor does get irritating at times.*

"I suppose it could be interesting," he muses. "Maybe the dragon could teach me to breathe deadly fog. It could mean a whole new future for me. I can see it now: 'Step right up, folks! Come and see the amazing pink-breathed merchant of Stonekin Hollow!' "

"I'm serious, Edmond," you say, annoyed.

"Well, I suppose it could be a nice switch from balancing books for a few days. . . ." he pauses and then claps his hands together, his eyes lighting up. "Sure, I'll come along." Then he winks at your mother. "Besides, it will give me a chance to convince your daughter that I'd make a terrific husband."

"Such a fine young fellow," murmurs Lady Mertice.

"I want to bring a sword with me, though," he adds.

"My father has one tucked away in a bureau somewhere. What else do we need?"

"I have my magic weapons with me," you say. "And we can find other help from dissidents along the way."

You hug Lady Mertice tightly. "It may be several days before we return," you tell her. "Wish me courage, Mother."

"I do, dear. But be careful. I want you back here alive." She smiles through her tears as you leave.

After stopping for Edmond's sword, you head for the great stone wall that surrounds Tarsia, defining its boundaries. The bare silhouettes of trees stand desolate on the mountain against the glow of the rising moon. Another moon is setting, behind Perched Castle, casting an eerie aura of unreality to the scene.

"What an awful place!" says Edmond as you pass through the stone gateway that leads to the walled mountain path. "Aren't you glad I came along?"

Even without leaves, the tree branches are thick and tangled, and patches of pink fog hang among the limbs. *Who knows what strange creatures are lurking on this desolate mountain?* you think.

"Yes, I AM glad you came along," you admit.

That's a point in my favor," he teases.

"Let's get serious," you say. "Now, here's the plan. We need magic as well as fighting abilities in order to defeat the dragon. I suggest we stop first at the Academy of Magic. We must find a magic-user who will accompany us to Perched Castle."

"How far is this Academy?" he asks.

"I'm not sure. But this is the main path through Tarsia, and it winds all the way around the mountain up to Perched Castle. I'm sure we'll run into the Academy

of Magic along the way before we reach the castle."

"Why not go straight to the dragon?" Edmond asks suddenly. "We ought to attempt some peaceful negotiations before we go attacking with magicians and swords and—"

"Edmond!" you cry. "Any dragon that devastates the countryside and slaughters innocent people is not going to want to talk peaceably."

"Everyone has his price," says Edmond.

"This dragon is evil!" you cry in disbelief.

"Perhaps Lumanor would settle for a bagful of uncut diamonds. Or a collection of gold filigree."

"Listen Edmond," you say pushing a stray curl back off your forehead. "If you try to talk to the dragon, he will have you hypnotized in an instant! Now, I suggest we stop making light of this journey and work together—"

Just then you hear a rustling of dead leaves in the woods on your right, and you both stop short, peering into the darkness.

Edmond grabs your arm and pulls you up against the path wall. "Who goes there?" he cries into the dark woods, forgetting to draw his sword.

There is no answer, but the rustling grows louder. Just as you draw Streak, a bearded young man, thick of limb and clad in leather, appears among the gnarled tree trunks. At his side is a timber wolf, its back streaked with silver.

"Don't be alarmed. It is I, Folc of Tarsia Mountain," the young man says in a strong voice. He strokes the furry neck of the wolf. "Down, Jarlath," he commands, and the animal sits. "And who are you?" he asks then. "You're strangers in these parts."



"Yes," says Edmond, "from Stonekin Hollow."

Your eyes are pinned to the young man, who seems not at all threatened by your sword. His dark thick curls shine in the moonlight and his brown eyes gleam as if lit from within. *He is like an animal,* you think. *As self-assured as the wolf at his side.*

"Perhaps I can help you," he says gently. "You must have lost your way."

"Not at all," you say boldly, replacing Streak in its scabbard. "We are simply exploring the mountain, which, by the way, we find to be . . . intriguing."

Folc turns his gaze on you, and you look away for a moment, overcome by the power of his eyes.

"There *is* a strange intrigue about Tarsia, indeed," he says. "A wild and dangerous magnetism." He pauses then, silently examining you, your hair, your garb. His eyes settle on your sword, and you think you see a trace of puzzlement crease his brow.

"I trust you are a gifted swordswoman," he says, "or you wouldn't think of venturing into Tarsia."

"I am," you say, lifting your chin high. Folc's eyes are still pinned to Streak.

"It's a fine sword you carry," he says, almost as if he recognizes its power. "Still, I wouldn't explore too long. As I say, this mountain is wild and dangerous." He snaps his fingers and the wolf stands up, ready to move on.

"Good evening, sir," says Edmond.

"Good evening," answers Folc. But then he stops. "You haven't told me your names," he says then.

Folc's gaze once again meets yours, and you feel magnetized, lost in the depth of his bright eyes.

"I'm Summer," you say. "And this is Edmond."

Edmond shoots a sharp glance at you, but you ignore him, feeling that Folc could be of help to you.

"Perhaps you could direct us to the Academy of Magic," you say.

"It's another two twists up the path. You'll see a sign. And," he adds, "should you need my help, my cottage is just through these woods, on the trail overlooking the sea."

Then he passes by, continuing on through the woods.

Edmond turns to you, his eyes bright with anger. "I can't believe it!" he exclaims. "How dare you look at him that way!"

"I don't know what you're talking about," you say, embarrassed that your attraction was so obvious.

"Yes, you do, Summer. I'm not blind. You couldn't take your eyes off that . . . that mountain boy."

"Don't be ridiculous, Edmond," you snap. "Let's just get on to the Academy."

You continue down the path with Edmond, but your mind wanders back to Folc. *His eyes glowed like brown crystals,* you think, *filled with strength and gentleness at the same time. He seemed so serious, so intense. Not at all like Edmond and his carefree ways.*

You are suddenly torn from your daydreams as a loud buzzing pierces the night. You look up to see the sky thick with huge insects, their great wings pearly and colorful in the moonlight.

"What are they, Summer?" asks Edmond.

"They look like . . . like giant dragonflies," you whisper. "I've never seen any so huge!"

The insects are enormous, nearly as big as horses, and you stiffen with apprehension as they descend

upon the stony wall, blocking the path in front of you. Their eyes shimmer with a silvery-pink coolness.

"Good evening," hums a dragonfly, hovering overhead.

Edmond pats your hand, which is tightly grasped on the hilt of your sword.

"Let me take care of this, Summer," he says. "Just leave that blade where it is."

He smiles brightly at the insect overhead, who appears to be the leader, and asks, "How can we help you?"

How can he be charming to these monstrous insects, who may be very dangerous? you fume.

"It is *we* who have come to help *you* —to protect you from the dangers of the night," hums the dragonfly.

"That's thoughtful of you," says Edmond, "but—"

"We heard you say that you are strangers on your way to the Academy," says the insect. "We're offering to carry you on our backs to your destination."

You shoot a wary glance at Edmond.

"Well, that's a very kind offer—" says Edmond.

"But why are you being so kind to us?" you ask.

The dragonfly's eyes shift up toward Perched Castle. "Tarsia is fraught with danger," it hums, "especially at night, when the Moon Dragon is most powerful. Two strangers traveling alone will never live to see sunrise."

"Excuse us for a moment," Edmond tells the insect. He moves toward you, wrapping his arm around your shoulder.

"I think we should take them up on their offer, Summer. They know the dangers of this mountain better than we do."

You shake your head. "There's something very sus-

picious about a hundred dragonflies appearing out of nowhere and offering to help us. And their eyes, Edmond," you whisper, "their eyes are very strange. How do we know they haven't been hypnotized by the Moon Dragon?"

"Summer," says Edmond, "they're insects. All insects have strange eyes. Besides, dragonflies are harmless creatures. What could happen to—"

"*Small* dragonflies are harmless," you interrupt.

"Come on, Summer. My feet could use a rest."

"Edmond, Tarsia is very dangerous, and we shouldn't trust . . ." you begin.

Your voice dies as a dragonfly next to Edmond motions to him with its antenna. "Climb on my back, and I'll fly you to the Academy," it says.

To your chagrin, Edmond straddles the insect's back.

"Come along now, Summer," he calls.

You narrow your eyes, furious. *Perhaps this is where we part,* you think. *I* won't *be told what to do.*

And yet Edmond, with his charming manner and familiar ways, does give you a sense of security. *He could probably talk his way out of the worst kind of danger,* you think.

Are you going to follow your own instincts or join Edmond?

You decide to go with Edmond and the dragonflies. Turn to page 43.

You think it best to go on alone, not trusting the dragonflies. Turn to page 17.

The music seemed so sweet and lilting, you think, seeing Folc's eyes glow in the firelight. *Perhaps we could take time for just one dance.*

"I really don't dance well," you remind Folc. "But I'd love to try."

"Wonderful!" exclaims the elf-king. He motions to the clan, and the music begins again, floating on the air and rising above the treetops.

Folc is gentle as his hand encircles your waist. "Just let me lead you," he says.

Before the words are out of his mouth, you lift your foot to move to the music . . . and stomp right on top of Folc's boot. You freeze, feeling the redness rush into your cheeks.

"Oh, Folc, I'm so sorry!" you cry.

"Don't be," he says softly. "Just relax, Summer."

You hold your breath as you start again, unable to talk or think or smile. Folc's hand presses your back gently, moving you slowly forward, then back, then spinning you in a circle. Soon you grow more comfortable, letting Folc lead and forgetting about your clumsiness. The music floats around you.

The trees whiz by in a blur as you whirl about, lightheaded, the warmth of Folc's hands making you giddy. You look up at Folc, who smiles at you.

"You're a natural," he says. "And I can't think of anyone I'd rather be dancing with right now."

You spin round and round, lightly, happily. It seems there are so many elves, so many trees, so many stars, it's like a dream. You want it never to end, you want it to go on and on.

But suddenly you realize the elves have stopped dancing and are staring at you, their eyes shimmering

with a pink glow. *Is that glow from the firelight?* you wonder. The flutes are playing a repetitive tune, a hypnotic sort of song, high-pitched and eerie.

"Something is wrong," you say, blinking. "Folc?" Your vision seems to be blurred, and you feel sleepy.

From the darkness beyond the fire comes the voice of the elf-king, now toneless and hollow: "Keep dancing," it commands. "You will dance to the music of the Moon Dragon forever."

You stop and back away from Folc, shaking your head.

"Let's keep dancing, Summer," Folc says. He moves toward you, taking your hand. As you look at him, you see a soft pink glow around his body, and you feel entranced by Folc's dark eyes and his tousled curls.

"No, Folc!" you shout. "Stop!" You release your hand from his.

"Don't you see what's happening, Folc?" you cry. "We're being hypnotized. It's some kind of spell!"

Folc rubs his bleary eyes and looks around him at the band of gaping elves. He covers his face with his hands for a moment and then suddenly spins around toward Dorbin, his arms outstretched. You hear strange words spilling from his mouth, and all at once a blue bolt rushes from his fingertips, through the fire, toward the king.

Dorbin's hood blows back from his face, and he begins to stagger, as if caught in a great blast of wind. Then you see his eyes. They are pale as a new moon, shimmering pink in the firelight!

"No!" the elf-king screams. "Keep dancing! You must dance!"

He lurches forward, reeling around the bonfire

toward Folc. But before he can get close, Folc shoots another bolt of blue lightning through the clearing, and Dorbin and all the elves collapse to the ground, groaning in agony.

"I think we'd better get out of here," you say.

"There's no danger anymore," says Folc. "I've freed them from the spell of the Moon Dragon."

And, indeed, the elf-king sits up, rubbing his eyes. "Thank you, Folc. You have saved my soul."

Suddenly he jumps to his feet and pushes through the circle of elves, toward you.

"While you were dancing, I sent a mind message to Lumanor to come and capture you. He's on his way!"

"Then we've got to leave immediately!" you cry.

"You could never outrun Lumanor," says Dorbin. "Trust me. I have a plan. The three of us together could have a chance of taking the dragon by surprise."

You shoot a glance at Folc and see that he is closely examining the elf-king. Dorbin's eyes are light green now, as wood elves' should be. But the shimmering pink mist hangs in the birch branches above, and an eerie feeling creeps up your spine.

"Can we trust him?" you whisper to Folc.

He runs his fingers slowly across his lips. "Nothing is certain, Summer," he says. "But I think he really means what he says."

"We have no time to waste," says Dorbin. "Are you with me or not?"

If you decide to trust the elf, turn to page 29.

If you would rather make a quick getaway to the wolves' lair, turn to page 138.

"I will never pay homage to you, vile creature!" you cry, fumbling for your sunbeams.

You pull the flowered jar from your pocket, and just then Lumanor dives forward with glistening claws, whipping the sunbeams from your grasp. He flings them across the chamber and turns his gaze on you. His eyes are bright with triumph and mockery.

"You cannot conquer me!" you shout. "And you will never call Stonekin Hollow your own!"

He throws back his scaly head, howling with delight, and in a flash, lunges at you again. He tears your amulet from its chain and hurls it to the stony floor, shattering it into a thousand fragments.

"Now you will succumb to my spell!" he bellows.

"Don't look into his eyes, Summer!" shouts Folc. "I haven't the power to save us both!"

The voice of your grandmother echoes through the chamber, its tone now eerie and hollow. "Do as the dragon says, Summer. Look into his eyes."

"I will never be enchanted by you!" you cry.

"Never?" roars Lumanor, his head now inches from yours. "Never? Your grandmother once said that, but she changed her mind."

"No!" you scream, whirling away from the dragon to avoid meeting his gaze. "I don't believe you!"

From the corner of your eye you see Folc inching toward the unbroken jar of sunbeams. *He's going to get a hold on them in just a second,* you think hopefully. *And then I'll go to grab Streak—*

But just at that moment, Lumanor lets out a bellow, long and mysterious, like a magical incantation. "If you refuse to be enchanted," he howls, "then you shall be imprisoned forever!"

The stone floor suddenly opens up right beneath your feet, and you are plunged into darkness, falling, falling, far and deep down a foggy tunnel. You feel the rabbit clawing at your arm to keep hold.

A flash of light shoots into the room above, and you know that Folc has flung your sunbeams at Lumanor.

Too late, you think as you sail through the misty tunnel, crashing down on a hard, stony surface. You sit up slowly, bruised from the fall.

"Summer!" calls your grandmother's voice, and this time you know it's real when you feel her arms encircling you. "Are you all right, Summer?"

You blink the fog from your eyes and smile as you see your grandmother's face. "You're alive, Grandma," you murmur.

Her strong frame is gaunt now, the shawl over her thin dress frayed and tattered. But her amethyst eyes twinkle with the determination you remember so well. You hug her tightly.

"What happened to me? Where am I?" you ask.

"You're in the dragon's dungeon, Summer," she says. "Lumanor tried to hypnotize you, but you refused." She smiles proudly and then continues, "So you ended up here."

You glimpse around at the circle of faces that surrounds you both. "And are these people all prisoners, Grandma?"

"They certainly are," she says. "The dragon didn't kill us, because he thought he could use our abilities to help attract other prisoners that he could hypnotize to do his bidding."

She glances around at the group, everyone frail and thin from years of imprisonment. "We have nineteen

other fighters," she tells you, "and fifteen magic-users and a host of clerics and thieves."

She turns to the other prisoners, saying, "This is my granddaughter, the accomplished swordswoman I've been telling you about." They nod their approval.

Suddenly Edmond leaps onto your lap, wriggling his pink nose.

"Grandma," you say, holding the rabbit up for her to see. "Do you remember Edmond, my friend from the Hollow?" She nods. "Well, here he is!"

"My heavens, I didn't remember him ever being so cuddly." She laughs, tweaking his nose. "And certainly never so quiet!"

Edmond bares his teeth, narrowing his blue eyes.

"He's asked me to marry him, grandma," you say.

She clicks her tongue. "An interesting match. A rabbit of a husband with a warrior of a wife."

Edmond wriggles from your grip and hops off to the corner, seething.

Seeing a dragonfly guard posted outside the cell, you walk your grandmother to a corner away from the guard's earshot. The other prisoners follow.

"How do we get out of here?" you whisper.

"The same question we've been asking for years," says one of the fighters. "There's a key on the wall next to the guard's stool," he says, pointing through the iron bars. "But there's always a guard on duty, and so far, we've found no way to get that key."

"But aren't there magic-users in here?" you ask.

"Yes," a magic-user answers. "But the dragon took all our magical pouches. And even if we had them, surrounding the prison is an anti-magic shell that prevents the magic-users and clerics from casting spells."

"And," your grandmother adds, "none of the fighters have weapons, or the thieves tools. We are virtually helpless."

"But now," you whisper, shooting a sidelong glance at Edmond, "we have a harmless rabbit with us. If somehow our little rabbit could befriend the guard, I'm sure he could find a way to sneak us the key."

Edmond wriggles his nose, still miffed at you and your grandmother. You pick him up and stroke the fur between his blue eyes. *He loves compliments,* you think. *I'll try a little flattery.*

"Edmond," you say sweetly. "I don't know of anyone whose powers of persuasion are better than yours. Even if you look like a rabbit, I know you're a fine negotiator at heart. Do it, please?"

Suddenly his eyes beam with pleasure. He hops from your arm and sticks his nose out between the bars. The dragonfly guard shoots a nasty glance in his direction.

"Hey, what do you think you're doing, rabbit?" it hums. "Stay in there!"

Edmond cocks his head to one side, and he points a white paw at his mouth.

"So you're hungry, huh?" hums the guard. It rises on its long hairy legs and crosses to the cell, shaking its head. "So what's a little rabbit doing in prison, anyway? I kind of feel bad for you."

Edmond hangs his head sadly.

"Well," hums the guard, "I don't care a bit about the rest of these criminals. But you remind me of a furry little rabbit I used to play with in the meadow when I was young."

The creature bends its antennae toward Edmond. "Listen," it whispers. "If you'll keep your mouth shut,

I'll see if maybe I can find you a carrot someplace."

Edmond's eyes gleam, and he nods vigorously.

"Now stay right there. I'll be back in a minute."

As the guard heads off down the passageway, Edmond wriggles through the bars and leaps at the key, knocking it to the floor. He clamps it in his mouth and races back into the cell.

"Good work, Edmond!" you whisper, grabbing the key. You reach through the bars to unlock the door.

"Now," you tell the others, "we must get to the treasure room, where we'll pick up weapons and magic pouches. Then we'll all hunt for the dragon together."

The prisoners nod, and you and Grandma Millicent lead them through a passageway, up a staircase and out of the dungeon. As you round the bend into the next tunnel, you run right into the dragonfly guard. But in a flash, all nineteen fighters are on top of it, knocking the guard to the ground, unconscious.

There is a single dragonfly at each guard post, and the fighters easily handle them, leaving them lying on the stone floor, their wings limp.

Remembering the details of Folc's map, you lead everyone through tunnels and chambers until you come to the treasure room. Right before your eyes, the door opens, and there stands Folc, your magic sword in hand, and Jarlath!

"We must get to Lumanor before he discovers you've escaped!" he says, handing you Streak. "He's angry enough, knowing that I got away with your sword!"

Quickly the prisoners spring into the treasure room, the fighters grabbing swords, the magicians rummaging for their magic pouches, and the thieves filling their pockets with gems. Edmond hops about from

mounds of gold to piles of rubies, his eyes gleaming and his pink nose wiggling.

"Let's go," whispers Grandma Millicent. "On to the Moon Dragon!"

Folc in the lead, you all tiptoe toward the winding staircase that leads to the chamber where he left the dragon. A thin pink mist hangs in the air, and you can hear the snorts and grunts of the beast from above.

You turn to Folc and your grandmother. "We need to distract the dragon," you say. "We don't want him to see us approaching."

"I can weave a spell," says Folc.

Your eyes widen as you notice Edmond at your feet. "Wait," you say. "I've got an idea!"

You pick up Edmond and whisper in his soft ear, "Your job is to distract the dragon, Edmond. Now go up and see if you can get Lumanor to turn his back away from us."

Edmond's furry body trembles wildly, and his eyes widen in fright.

"Go on, Edmond!" you hiss. "Do it!"

Edmond hops up the stairs, his tail shaking, and scurries into the chamber, keeping close to the wall. You and Folc follow him and peek into the chamber.

"Well, if this doesn't look like a fine morsel to nibble on before dinner!" snarls Lumanor. He lurches toward the rabbit, turning his back away from the staircase, and Edmond lets out a high-pitched yowl that echoes through the castle.

Just then, you signal to the prisoners, and they storm up the staircase, leaping toward Lumanor.

Under Folc's direction the magic-users together cast a Light Spell so powerful that the large chamber is

ablaze with a brilliant white light. Lumanor rears toward the ceiling, blinded and howling with rage.

You and the fighters circle the huge beast, brandishing your weapons, when suddenly he breathes a cloud of poisonous pink fog. As you all retreat to the staircase, the clerics combine their powers and cast a Neutralize Poison Spell on each of you to save you from the deadly effects of the mist.

Recovering his sight as the Light Spell begins to fade, Lumanor shrieks, "So, you dissidents prefer death to life imprisonment. Then so be it." And he sweeps his tail around, the moon-globed end cracking like a whip and knocking down most of the thieves.

Just then, Jarlath lunges toward the dragon, sinking his razor-sharp teeth deeply into the monster's back. With sword held high, you charge forward and bring Streak down hard, the blade cutting into Lumanor's offending tail.

The dragon screams in pain now, dark red blood spurting from both wounds, and he shakes his massive head, freeing himself from Jarlath's clamped jaws. You hear a dull thud as the wolf falls to the stone floor, whimpering.

Then Lumanor's pink-threaded eyes focus on you, and as you turn to avert your eyes you hit something hard. An invisible wall stands between you and anyone who can help you!

Whirling around, you see the dragon's dripping fangs slowly descend toward you.

"Now," hisses Lumanor, "you will serve as an example to all, as they witness your destruction!"

Terror paralyzes you, and your mind races with plans of attack, unable to settle on one.

Suddenly Jarlath springs from the floor to Lumanor's back, again biting into the beast's scaly hide. The wolf's attack jolts you into action. As the dragon rears back, you see the mark of the crescent moon. Gripping Streak with both hands, you swing it upward and plunge it deep into the dragon's throat.

The monster gives a horrible shriek, and, as if in slow motion, he collapses to the floor, gradually dissolving into a pink-colored gas, this one harmless.

The prisoners, free and victorious, shout and cheer in celebration, hugging each other and leaping up and down like children. The invisible wall now gone, Folc crosses to wrap his arms around you and Jarlath.

"I see you two make quite a team," he says.

"I thought the same of you and Summer," says Grandma Millicent, coming over and hugging you. "You work well together."

You feel your cheeks flush bright red, and you look away from Folc's bright eyes. Edmond hops up and down on the floor, wriggling his nose angrily.

"Don't you think it's time we had Edmond back again?" you ask Folc.

"I suppose so," he says. He leans down to place his hands on the rabbit's back and with a POOF! Edmond is stalking in front of you, boiling with anger.

"I could have been eaten alive by that dragon!" he huffs, checking his trousers for wrinkles. "What you did was cruel! And all the insults"

While Edmond rambles on, Folc winks at you, and with a few magic words, has you all traveling in a golden cloud back down to Stonekin Hollow.

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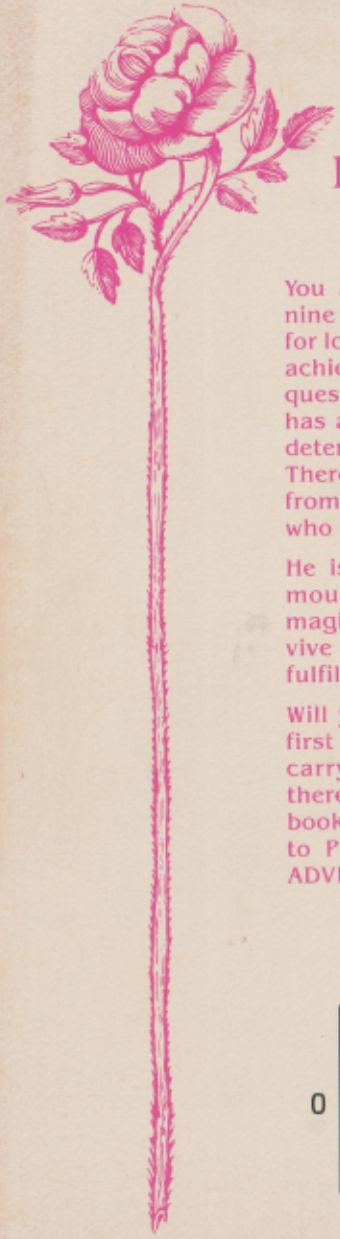
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